DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Going Down the 'Wabbit' Hole

A Remediative Approach to the Filmmaking of the Coen Brothers

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Award date:
2020

Going Down the ‘Wabbit’ Hole: A Remediative Approach to the Filmmaking of the Coen Brothers

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PhD Film Studies Thesis

University of Dundee

February 2021

Word Count – 99,996 Words

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Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis is my own, in no way plagiarised, and that all the references cited in it have been researched and indicated.

Gregg Barrie

Revision Date: August 2020

Abstract

The Coen brothers are sometimes dismissed as mere parodists or imitators, simply copying images, themes and motifs from a variety of sources. In a postmodern world, however, strict definitions are more complicated. Whilst we may think of this practice as a mode of intertextual practice, what was once considered intertextuality is now out-dated, as it refers only to works of literature. Instead, when inspirations can cross media from other forms, it is most appropriate to consider this as intermediality. Yet, whilst the Coen brothers' films are certainly in keeping with intermedial theory, this alone does not define them. They are best understood through the underlying process of remediation, as advocated by Bolter and Grusin. This posits that all works, no matter which medium they belong to, can only be interpreted through their relationships with other works which they recall, be it knowingly or not. In all of their eighteen films so far, the Coen brothers have revealed themselves to be consciously remediative filmmakers, using other sources (including literary fiction, other films and music) to inform their work. This process, by which their films become new amalgamative wholes, marks them out. It is defined by the ways in which they use remediations of other sources to both revive period styles and genres, further informing their own stories, creating connections and through-lines to cinematic history and allowing them to revisit the past in a postmodern way. This thesis will primarily demonstrate this process by outlining the theoretical basis of this process and by creating a catalogue of many (although not all) of these remediations, ultimately showing why they should be viewed as remediative filmmakers, by analysing nine of their films in detail, alongside their most high-profile unfilmed screenplay, to show how creative and significant the practice of remediation is when used as a theory of filmmaking.

Introduction

Joel and Ethan Coen are cinematic curators. Indeed, their exhaustive knowledge of, and admiration for, film as well as of other media, results in their films taking both visual and thematic inspiration from many past sources across different media, in a way which also fundamentally informs their own stories. Additionally, most of their films are set in specific historical periods, meaning that they become a mode of storing, maintaining, examining, and recreating history, be it cultural, societal, political or artistic. Importantly, this curation is a creative process, meaning that it is not simply a means by which to collect past works in their films. As the nature of their filmmaking is one of active engagement, these recollections of sources are more than just an act of preservation. Unfortunately, this is not widely understood, and, as such, their work is often associated by critics with mere parody and other forms of imitation. When interviewed by Kristine McKenna in 2001, however, the Coen brothers baulked at the notion of describing their filmmaking in this way, maintaining that, 'We've always tried to emulate the sources of genre movies rather than the movies themselves […] We've never considered our stuff [as] either homage or spoof. Those are things other people call it, and it's always puzzled [us] that they do'.[1]

This is an important distinction, because whilst some filmmakers are defined by the ways they either subvert or embrace genre, the Coen brothers fit somewhere in between. Their films do subvert genre, but also embrace it at the same time. They move between genres, exploring something different in every film, yet they also revisit particular influences, as with their hard-boiled films, but always in a unique way. Their debut *Blood Simple* (1984) is presented as a neo-noir thriller, *Miller's Crossing* (1990) is styled as a prohibition-era gangster film, *The Big Lebowski* (1998) may well be a detective adventure, but it is foremost a comedy, and *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) assumes the look of classic film noir whilst also capturing the paranoia of 1950s science fiction. These films share similar fundamental influences in the form of American Detective fiction, yet they are all markedly different. This can be tied back to their 2001 interview, as they are

[1] Kristine McKenna, 'Joel and Ethan Coen', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 163-187 (p. 180).

actively attempting to emulate many different genres in their films. Their base inspiration may be the same, however, as they are framing it through another genre (be it thriller, drama or comedy) or style (neo-noir, gangster, stoner comedy, film noir or sci-fi), the results are very different, allowing each of their films to mix various recollections from across media including textual sources, distinguishing their filmmaking as a practice of creative remediation as well as one of curation. In turn, this practice also allows the Coen brothers to include levels of commentary in their films, the remediation of selected sources effectively imbuing their works with recreations of key historical and political moments. Whilst this thesis is primarily concerned with cataloguing the instances of remediation in the Coen canon, there are several examinations of this commentary, which could easily be expanded upon in a further study.

As described by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), the concept of remediation stresses that newer forms of 'media can never reach [a] state of transcendence, but will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media'.[2] In other words, remediation posits that in a contemporary world all forms of art engage with their predecessors and with other formats, a sentiment which appears justified given my work, and whilst Bolter and Grusin concentrate on digital media related to computing, they nonetheless contend that film 'mix[es] media and styles unabashedly.'[3] As they explain:

> A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media. There may be or may have been cultures in which a single form of representation (perhaps painting or song) exists with little or no reference to other media. Such isolation does not seem possible for us today, when we cannot even [recognise] the representational power of a medium except with reference to other media.[4]

This implies that, in a postmodern world, it is impossible for any work to be completely singular or disconnected, however, this is separate from claims of originality. Applying this to the films of the Coen brothers, it would suggest that, as works of remediation, they cannot exist without referencing and recalling ('entering into relationships of respect and rivalry' with) other works from across media,

[2] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 50.
[3] Ibid., p. 6.
[4] Ibid., p. 65.

especially those of particular influence to them as artists, and, in a contemporary sense, this process generates greater meaning and understanding for the viewer. Arguably, practices of imitation such as homage and spoof imply a lack of creativity, but as remediation suggests, in a postmodern world, it is impossible not to quote, intentionally or not, from another source. This in turn fuels debates about originality in contemporary art forms, as the nature of 'remediation is both what is "unique to [new media]" and what denies the possibility of that uniqueness.'[5]

By both embracing and subverting different genre, styles, and conventions, at the same time, all of the Coen brothers' works are 'entering into relationships of respect and rivalry' with other sources they are inspired by and are thus remediating. Without the critical underpinning of remediation, their films can therefore appear to defy classification, however, as they are actively selecting the works they remediate, then modifying them accordingly to inform and add context and deeper meaning to their own stories, this process of choosing elements from multiple sources also identifies them as amalgamative filmmakers. By continually transitioning between genres and styles of film, one can never guess what they will deliver next, revisiting both cinematic and actual history in the process. Importantly though, this is not done through mere imitation. Instead, recollections of their influences are included as marks of respect, and, in a postmodern landscape, are arguably unavoidable.

Through these active processes of curation, remediation and amalgamation, the Coen brothers are not just recalling a plethora of influential sources from different media, they are also inviting their audience to seek out the original works: meaning their films also become examples of hypermediation, whereby a work contains identifiable and traceable, intrinsic and explicit connections (hyperlinks) to other works. This ensures their standing as remediative filmmakers, who use the creative processes outlined above to collect, preserve, and engage with history and tradition through a multitude of sources. As such, their works recapture and recall the filmmakers, genres, and styles which they admire and have impacted them as artists. The process of amalgamative filmmaking and its relationship with remediation, as well as the meaning and implications of the

[5] Ibid., p. 50.

theory of hypermedia will be examined in detail shortly, however, having established that the Coen brothers are utilising remediation, it is prudent to explore why this is different from mere imitation.

The Imitation Game

Many parties, both admirers and detractors, view the Coen brothers' canon as an exercise in the tradition of self-conscious imitation. Whilst admirers tend to think of their films as works of homage, detractors are more inclined to dismiss them as parodies. In *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (1995), Margaret Rose associates parody with 'burlesque': a 'close literary imitation' often in a comic form, or a 'composition modelled on and imitating another work, [especially] a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are [satirised] by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect.' [6] Tracing this idea to literary roots in the sixteenth century, *The Oxford English Dictionary* also notes that its use has since been extended to other art forms, including the cinema.[7] Conversely, a work seen as an homage carries more favourable associations than other acts of imitation (be they parody, pastiche or spoofery), as it is seen as more complimentary. In *Pastiche* (2007), Richard Dyer notes that the act of homage 'always entails positive appreciation of a past work or its makers.'[8] Despite this though, some readings still view any form of homage, like parody, as just another method of imitation, but there is more than simple imitation at work in the films of the Coen brothers.

Other practices, including pastiche, literally a hodgepodge of various ingredients,[9] and spoofing, making another source 'appear foolish [often] by means of parody',[10] can also be described as forms of imitation. Yet, whilst each of these terms has been applied to the films of the Coen brothers, the accusation of mere

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[6] Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 5-8.
[7] OED: Oxford English Dictionary, 'parody, *n*.2', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138059?rskey=2HJhJF&result=2#eid [date accessed: 17th May 2018].
[8] Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 23.
[9] Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 1.
[10] OED: Oxford English Dictionary, 'spoof, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/187391?rskey=JNBwp0&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid [date accessed: 14th June 2016].

imitation overlooks the constant, and indeed dominant, facet of every single one of their films: namely, the practice of creative remediation, which in turn makes them paradoxically the principal authors of their films, a distinction especially important when their filmmaking moved into methods of straight adaptation, as I shall show. They unquestionably utilise and recall a wide variety of sources in each of their films. Crucially though, this is never a result of a lack of originality or an attempt to merely imitate the works they admire and respect. Indeed, discussing the proliferation of their sources, Jeffrey Adams stresses that, 'Despite the filmmakers' disclaimers, Coen brothers movies invite, indeed, mischievously encourage hermeneutic treasure hunting, challenging audiences to engage actively with the film text, often tempting viewers to decipher what appears to be a hidden code.'[11] Adams argues that the siblings' multiple allusions are a deliberate act designed to engage the audience with other influential works. However, he does not value this form of 'treasure hunting' as anything other than a game of recognition, but I will show that it is much more. It is a practice of creative remediation, whereby the recollections of other work in their films not only serves their own stories and motivations, but also acts as a trail of influences for viewers to follow and discover, and through this process, their films in fact become examples of hypermedia.

William Mooney, however, regards the Coen brothers' constant reference to past texts as a 'kind of verbal echo, insistent and unnecessary'.[12] Unfortunately, Mooney does not consider the visual aspect of this style of filmmaking, a quality understood by Josh Levine who explains that 'the Coen brothers are not merely word-rich. Their talent is a combination of the literate and the visual.'[13] Indeed, what few commentators grasp is that each recollection in a Coen brothers' film can add a deeper meaning to the story itself. Importantly, although a failure to comprehend any of these references, singly or collectively, will stop the viewer reaching a more nuanced understanding of the film, this does not usually affect enjoyment or comprehension of the plot.

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[11] Jeffrey Adams, *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 3.
[12] William H. Mooney, *Dashiell Hammett and the Movies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), p. 164.
[13] Josh Levine, *The Story of Two American Filmmakers* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2000), p. viii.

An act of parody, or any of the other associated practices highlighted above, despite often having creative worth and purpose, is sometimes viewed as a poor imitation. According to Linda Hutcheon, however, in a contemporary approach, a parody represents a creative 'superimposition' of different sources, making it 'one of the major art forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse.'[14] Therefore, a parody, indeed any imitation, can potentially represent an amalgamation of various sources, an intermedial practice where any art form takes influence and inspiration from a myriad of sources and blends them together in a coherent way; a creative process of relative originality.

Works of imitation are often undervalued as unoriginal though, as previous understandings of the term, as derived from its literary roots, are now outdated. This is particularly evident in consideration of cinema, where the term homage is never primarily used as a criticism. Instead, it encapsulates the 'historical dimension' of filmmaking,[15] where every film, either knowingly or not, unavoidably recalls an existing source of some kind. To quote Mooney in specific relation to the Coen brothers, 'Key scenes from [source texts] and [...] earlier films are reworked with layers of reference and revision'.[16] In this way, these practices have evolved beyond mere imitation into the realm of 'intertextuality'.

The Intertext and the Intermedial

Intertextual theory originally applied to works of literature. In a contemporary understanding though, it is now linked with all forms of allusion, and is used to describe practices across the arts.[17] Marko Juvan defines intertextuality as the 'idea that a text is but a mosaic of citation,' a mixture of allusions to pre-existing works which inform the structure and meaning of a new work of art.[18] This notion stems from a belief that in a postmodern world the concept of absolute originality

[14] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 2.
[15] Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 231.
[16] Mooney, p. 163.
[17] Yelena Baraz and Christopher S. van der Berg, 'Intertextuality: Introduction', *American Journal of Philiology,* 134.1 (Spring 2013), pp. 1-8 (p.1).
[18] Marko Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 49.

has vanished, everything that can be said has been said; whether unknowingly or deliberately, everything in art is a reference or indirect quotation of something else.

Graham Allen notes that literature has become a completely intertextual art form, a 'non-original rewriting of what has already been written.'[19] It now possesses a meaning beyond that which is presented and exists in a dialogue between sources. For Allen, 'Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.'[20] By extension of the definitions offered above, this means that practices of imitation are also intertextual, meaning that by necessity these modes must be examined in a postmodern sense, in a world where there is no longer any notion of absolute originality, if it ever existed in the first place.

These ideas can be further developed through a consideration of the theory of intermedia. Intermedia refers to 'artistic [endeavours] that fall between distinct media, or genres established by cultural conventions at a given moment in time.'[21] As explained by Aristita I. Albacan, it was 'Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, who coined the term "intermedia" in 1965, and fathered the contemporary line of discussion on intermediality', as outlined above.[22] Roberta Smith expands on this, when noting that Higgins's original essay 'formulated the concept of works of art that combined different forms -- film and dance, painting and sculpture'.[23] In his essay, Higgins explores a specific piece of art 'as an intermedium, an uncharted land that lies between collage, music and the theatre. It is not governed by rules; each work determines its own medium and forms according to its needs.'[24]

It would seem then that intermediality is a more useful theory by which to comprehend the cross-media nature of postmodern creativity than the more

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[19] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 104-105.
[20] Ibid., p. 1.
[21] Aristita I. Albacan, *Intermediality and Spectatorship in the Theatre Work of Robert Lepage: The Solo Shows* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 73.
[22] Ibid., p. 73.
[23] Roberta Smith, 'Dick Higgins, 60, Innovator In the 1960's Avant-Garde', *The New York Times*, October 31st 1998, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/31/arts/dick-higgins-60-innovator-in-the-1960-s-avant-garde.html [date accessed: 2nd June 2018].
[24] Dick Higgins, 'Intermedia', *the something else Newsletter*, Volume 1, Number 1 (February 1966), http://www.primaryinformation.org/oldsite/SEP/Something-Else-Press_Newsletter_V1N1.pdf [date accessed:2nd June 2018].

medium specific notion of intertextuality. Higgins concluded his essay by noting, 'I would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than [categorisation] is the hallmark of our new mentality.'[25] Indeed, as Ani Maitra (who alternatively credits the term's inception to German artist Hans Breder) states, intermedia 'is interested in producing *frictions* between different media like film, theatre, music, poetry, and the visual arts […] aim[ing] not so much to "fuse" or "unite" disparate media ([as this would be] closer to "multimedia" and "mixed media"), but rather to [emphasise] the interaction and encounter between the disparities, and transform the structure of each medium.'[26] This concept of intermediality comes closer to capturing the Coen brothers' filmmaking process, whilst its postmodern evolution also means that it is more fitting than simple intertextuality, as by definition intermediality deals with the mixture of different media in a particular work. It is this mixture of allusions to (and absorptions of) literature, film, music and other cultural forms, which places the films of the Coen brothers into the realm of intermedia.

Consequently, intermedia also ties in with the notion of remediation, as both posit that all forms of art actively engage with their predecessors and other formats, and in turn, remediation can lead to hypermediacy. As stated by Bolter and Grusin, 'hypermedia applications are always explicit acts of remediation: they import earlier media into a digital space in order to critique and refashion them.'[27] In other words, hypermedia forms engage with the sources they are mixing and recalling, creating a series of hyperlinks to them, allowing a user to follow these to find the original content. Although Bolter and Grusin are referring to a digital platform, the basis of this thinking can be expanded in a more abstract sense to film. In their filmmaking, the Coen brothers employ remediation. However, by engaging with various sources from multiple media forms their films also effectively become hypermediative works, which inform themselves by creating a hypothetical series of hyperlinks to the earlier sources they engage with, in this sense encouraging audiences to seek out the 'originals' and expand their appreciation and

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ani Maitra, 'Confessions of the (ethnic) narcissist: Intermedia in diaspora', in *Intermedia in South Asia: The Fourth Screen*, ed. by Rajinder Dudrah, Sangita Gopal, Amit S. Rai and Anustup Basu (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 38-57 (p. 42).
[27] Ibid., p. 53.

understanding of these works. As Bolter and Grusin conclude, when considering 'hypermediacy, and remediation, historical afflictions among media do indeed matter; however there are no formal and social afflictions for which the chronology is not important. All currently active media (old and new, analog and digital) [honour], acknowledge, appropriate, and implicitly or explicitly attack one another.'[28]

Be it Alfred Hitchcock or Akira Kurosawa, the Western or film noir, these influences are all touchstones for the Coen brothers, sources which are remediated in their own films; in the terminology of Bolter and Grusin, older media forms which are acknowledged and appropriated to an extent by newer (or active) artists, the Coen brothers. Importantly, their films then take on the quality of hypermedia by actively collecting these influences together whilst inviting their viewers to discover or rediscover them, and this invitation in turn eliminates any notion that they are attacking their sources of remediation. Crucially, the processes of remediation and hypermediacy are engaged in actively, and are, in a postmodern context, unavoidable. The Coen brothers' films evoke a variety of sources which inform their own work creatively, but they are also transformed by them. Their films are excellent examples of 'inter-art discourse', works of remediation which also demonstrate hypermediality, the nature of which also underpins their standing as the principal authors of their films. Unfortunately, the nature of these processes can lead to confusion when critics mistakenly refer to all of the Coen brothers' features as adaptations.

Brian McFarlane argues that intertextuality represents a 'more sophisticated approach' to addressing cinematic adaptation, one which can account for references to many other art forms and not just a single source.[29] However, as I have shown intertextual theory is too limited due to its literary focus to be used in conjunction with the cinema, and in the case of the Coen brothers, their films are products of remediation; not simply adaptations. In *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments* (2015), Adams insists that

[28] Ibid., p. 87.
[29] Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.10.

> Because nearly everything the Coen brothers write is influenced in one way or another by literary sources, most of their films can be categorised as variations of adaptation. Their approach to the adaptation of these sources, however, departs significantly from conventional notions of adaptation as the attempt to render 'faithful' translations of the originals. Instead, the Coens seek to rework their literary sources in a process of 'free adaptation', not merely preserving and reproducing them, but inhabiting the style and fictional world of the precursor to create something quite like the original yet new.[30]

Adaptation is the process by which an existing work of art is translated into another medium, for example when a novel is made into a film.[31] However, this view overlooks instances where more than one source is incorporated into the resulting work. Therefore, a postmodern view of adaptation, where the resulting work can cover various media, exemplifies the theory of remediation.

Adams identifies the inclusion of sources from across the media spectrum as a form of 'free adaptation', and similarly, in his exploration of the theory, James Naremore argues that adaptation can also be a process of 'recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling.'[32] It seems then that the practice of adaptation can also represent a form of 'inter-art discourse' where a number of sources from different media inform another work. In this understanding of the term, adaptation can also be remediative in nature.

In a postmodern context then, the processes of imitation, adaptation, and filmmaking itself have all become acts of remediation; intermedial forms of art which allow for the creative amalgamation of numerous sources in one film. Yet, whilst adaptation will most likely continue to imply a work translated from a solitary source, 'free adaptation' as a descriptor is rather vague. Instead, when referring to these methods in a remediative sense, as in bringing together allusions to multiple sources in a single film, the process should more accurately be viewed as an act of creative amalgamation by remediation.

Amalgamation

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[30] Adams, p. 9.
[31] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.
[32] James Naremore, *Film and the Reign of Adaptation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 1-3.

A necessary shift in the approach to considering adaptation, the process of amalgamation by remediation can be demonstrated through an analysis of *Miller's Crossing*. Adams, and indeed many others, refer to the Coen brothers' third film as their Dashiell Hammett adaptation. This classification, however, fails to consider that *Miller's Crossing* is not an adaptation of any single Hammett work, but rather, the Coen brothers' attempt at crafting a story in the style and tradition of Hammett: they are 'inhabiting [his] style and fictional world […] to create something quite like the original yet new.' Their approach to filmmaking has allowed them to amalgamate features from different sources into their own version of a Hammett story, the film is a remediative manifestation of their 'fascination' with the author's work.[33]

Miller's Crossing is almost overflowing with allusions to Hammett's wider oeuvre. As Mooney states, 'the idea of a town on the take came from [...] *Red Harvest* [1929], [whilst] much of the narrative was lifted from the 1931 novel *The Glass Key*.'[34] Despite this though, the film is not simply an adaptation of either of these texts. These novels are in fact only two of the sources of inspiration informing the film. Mooney may believe that *Miller's Crossing* is an 'adaptation, not only of Hammett's novel but also of the two earlier film [versions of *The Glass Key*] as well as other sources',[35] however, it is not just that. The proliferation of sources throughout the film in fact produces 'a categorically different kind of work' than any single Hammett text.[36] Highlighting its standing as a product of amalgamative remediation, *Miller's Crossing* also recalls Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and *The Dain Curse* (1929). Additionally, the Coen brothers' film is inspired by previous cinematic adaptations of Hammett's novels, as well as other notable films from across various periods, genres, and styles.

These varied influences are amalgamated in *Miller's Crossing* through the process of remediation to inform the Coen brothers' version of a gangster film. *Miller's Crossing* is not simply an adaptation of Hammett, but rather an

[33] Bradley L. Herling, 'Ethics, Heart, and Violence in *Miller's Crossing*', in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 125-146 (p. 125).
[34] Levine, p. 61.
[35] Mooney, p. 154.
[36] Ibid., p. 154.

amalgamation, whose wide sources of inspiration move beyond the scope of Hammett altogether. The film does of course utilise multiple elements from Hammett's work, but it does not conform to traditional practices of adaptation. Instead, *Miller's Crossing* is a prime example of creative cinematic amalgamation, recalling Hammett's work, along with other sources from various media, without becoming a simple adaptation or mere imitation.

This practice of creative amalgamation through remediation has never been considered as a theory of filmmaking, with remediative and hypermediative properties often resulting in a film being labelled as an imitation. This is evident when examining existing critical writing on the films of the Coen brothers. In 'Philosophies of Comedy in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*', Douglas McFarland notes that their 2000 film is made up of references to various sources:

> Allusions to *The Odyssey*, Busby Berkeley, Leni Riefenstahl, the Three Stooges, Robert Johnson, and *The Wizard of Oz* [...] all appear [...] [and] [a]lthough these references play off one another in both obvious and subtle ways, the [entire film] is grounded in a particular moment in American history: the [events] in the South in the 1930s. This is, of course, a particularly dark episode […] and one that [could] generate some combination of outrage and guilt in [a] typically liberal [audience] [...] The rich array of allusions, in short, cannot be separated from a historical context that elicits [levels of] moral condemnation. It is this historical grounding that undermines a postmodern reading of the [film]. The assemblage of popular mythologies, pop culture references, and classical allusions does not, in this case constitute what Fredric Jameson and others term 'pastiche.' Unlike parody and satire, pastiche, according to Jameson, is 'the [cannibalisation] of all styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion.' And thus constitutes a 'neutral practice,' an artistic and cultural form that has been emptied of any ethical perspective and 'amputated of satiric impulse.' The postmodern pleasure of pastiche is the pleasure of [recognising] references, so that engaging [with] a text becomes a game of identification.[37]

By connecting the Coen brothers' filmmaking with allusions to other sources and an engagement with popular, cultural, and political history, McFarland effectively shows that they are filmmakers who employ practices of remediation. Their cinema, however, is not a process of mere cannibalisation as he puts it, but one of purposeful references and assembly. By doing so in the context of a certain period,

[37] Douglas McFarland, 'Philosophies of Comedy in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*'. in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 41-54 (p. 47).

style, or genre, as here with the Depression and 1930s America or the blacklist and the fear of Communism in Hollywood in the 1950s as seen in *Hail, Caesar!* (2016), the Coen brothers are infusing their remediations with historical and political commentary.

Their films manage to be critical of key moments in wider American historical and political contexts, but their remediative quality also allows for commentary on current affairs in a way which does not see them accused of being politically incendiary filmmakers, like Spike Lee for example. This engagement with past works and times also allows them to explore, exaggerate and challenge versions of history and how they have been mediated and inscribed in the collective cultural memory, and in Hollywood itself. This suggests another form of hypermediation, whereby their exploration of political and social history through past texts, films and other works invites their audience to seek out and research the real events. Hence, the Coen brothers utilise the practice of remediation in their filmmaking to create cinematic amalgamations, films which recall a range of sources from across media, whilst telling their own story.

For all the recollections of various sources in their films, the Coen brothers never include them as throwaway references; they in fact act like hyperlinks, allowing viewers to trace the original source. Whilst a failure to identify or understand any single allusion will not impair an understanding of the plot or themes of one of their films, an exploration of its meaning will add richness and depth to the viewer's interpretation of the film. In his evaluation of *Miller's Crossing*, Mooney remarks that 'understanding the film depends on a knowledge of its sources and references', [38] however, in a general sense of following and comprehending the story, this is simply not the case. The fallacy of this assertion can be demonstrated through an examination of the Coen brothers' *True Grit* (2010). The film begins with an epigraph, which proclaims that 'The wicked flee when none pursueth.'[39] Citing its source as the biblical verse Proverbs 28:1, this quotation provides an apt summary for the film, as the villainous Tom Chaney (Josh Brolin) runs away before anyone chases him, the wicked literally fleeing when no one pursues. By indicating the source though, the Coen brothers invite audience

[38] Mooney, pp. 159-160.
[39] *True Grit*, dir. by Joel and Ethan Coen (Paramount Pictures, 2010).

engagement, elevating the film into the realm of hypermedia, to discover the full verse. Finishing '[...] but the righteous are as bold as a lion',[40] the unincluded portion of the quotation is a more fitting synopsis of the film than the former, as the dogged Mattie Ross (Hailee Steinfeld) relentlessly chases Chaney in pursuit of justice and vengeance, the righteous boldly pursuing the wicked.[41] The Coen brothers, however, do not include this other part of the Bible verse. Not knowing it does not impact on the understanding and enjoyment of the film, but it does deepen and enrich it if you do. The further knowledge which their many remediations can lead to only act to inform their stories further, knowing is not absolutely necessary. Rather, it represents an extra layer of meaning and context for those who choose to follow the siblings down the rabbit hole.

On top of this extra layer of meaning, the grounding of their stories in specific historical contexts means that each Coen brothers film remains an original product of a creative process despite its remediation of any number of other sources. In *Senses of Cinema*, Paul Coughlin expands on the notion that the Coen brothers' use of a myriad of sources and historical contexts elevates their filmmaking beyond imitation and into something more critically challenging. He states that, 'The films of the Coen brothers display an acute awareness of history and its inscription in the texts of the past and the present. Joel and Ethan Coen do not employ pastiche to resolve a dearth of ideas, they actively examine the texts they draw from as a means to building a bridge to the past.'[42] They do not merely lift ideas from others, they actively engage with and develop them in an historical setting to imbue their own stories with both creative and critical substance. This gives their films another layer of significance. As well as the various remediations of their influences, which themselves add forms of historical and cultural context to their films, active engagement with various past settings allows the Coen brothers to interact with, discuss and critique past and present political, social and cultural issues. This is indicative of their standing as remediators, they remediate past works in their films

[40] Bible Gateway, Proverbs 28:1, *Bible Gateway*, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+28:1 [date accessed: 16th June 2016].
[41] *True Grit* (2010).
[42] Paul Coughlin, 'Joel and Ethan Coen', *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 26 May 2003, http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/coens/ [date accessed: 1st April 2015].

as a means by which to interactively link them with their inspirations and to give them a wider, more meaningful purpose.

Spreading the Workload

The question of authorship in the films of the Coen brothers is not confined to their recollections of sources, but also more practically to the siblings' division of labour itself. Joel and Ethan are the embodiment of collaborative filmmakers, the mere mention of the Coen name instantly conjures images of both brothers working together. Despite the clearly symbiotic nature of their filmmaking though, during the first half of their careers, there was a clear distinction between them, at least on the face of it. For their first ten films, *Blood Simple* to *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003), the credits only recognised Joel as the director, whilst Ethan was listed as a producer. This, however, was a meaningless division in practice, and since *The Ladykillers* (2004), the credits have reflected the truth. Every film in their career is an equal collaboration, a shared creative process. Ethan has always been involved with directing, and Joel has constantly been jointly responsible for production matters. Every one of their films, regardless of what the credits say, is a Coen brothers film, and this thesis will reflect this.

In an interview during publicity for *Blood Simple*, this issue was already being raised. Hal Hinson uncovered the true shared nature of the Coen brothers' filmmaking when he asked, 'How was it determined that Joel would direct and Ethan produce?'[43] Admitting that they did not have set roles, Joel replied that 'the credits on the movie do not [really] reflect the extent of the collaboration. I did a lot of things on the production side, and Ethan did a lot of directorial stuff. The line [between the different positions] wasn't clearly drawn ...'[44] Reflecting that this division was in name only, Levine notes that, 'Although the brothers had decided to call Joel the director and Ethan the producer, each would really act as both [...] the two made decisions together, and there never seemed to be a disagreement between them.'[45]

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[43] Hal Hinson, 'Bloodlines', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 3-16 (p. 12).
[44] Ibid., p. 12.
[45] Levine, p. 25.

The question of authorship in their films is, however, further complicated by the long list of their enduring collaborators. Not only do they work with each other, but the Coen brothers have also utilised the cinematography of Roger Deakins on twelve occasions. Meanwhile, Carter Burwell has scored every Coen brothers' film, except for *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013). Mary Zophres has assumed the role of costume designer for thirteen films in a row, beginning with *Fargo* (1996), and Nancy Haigh has been responsible for set decoration on twelve occasions. There are also numerous actors who have appeared in multiple films, and this is partly down to the casting director, who for the last ten films has been Ellen Chenoweth, whilst on the six previous occasions this was John Lyons (co-credited alongside Donna Isaacson on four). The point of listing these repeat collaborators is to stress that other parties are also partly responsible for the look, sound, feel and even casting of their films. The Coen brothers, however, always write and direct their own material, are actively involved in the production process, and have edited fifteen of their films together under the pseudonym Roderick Jaynes. This means that the Coen brothers are in control of the four major elements of the filmmaking process, and anecdotally, have a say in shooting, design, and casting. It seems then, that despite recalling many sources, the Coen brothers are representative of 'original' filmmakers in a postmodern context. Their vision marks them out as the principal authors of their own films. They are responsible for so many different facets of their films' creation that they may in fact be 'auteurs'.

The Coen Brothers as Auteurs

The theory of the auteur filmmaker is itself a contentious subject. In *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (2013), Peter Wollen states that the

> *politique des auteurs* – the auteur theory, as Andrew Sarris calls it – was developed by the loosely knit group of critics who wrote for *Cahiers du cinema* [...] [and] sprang from the conviction that the American cinema was worth studying in depth, that masterpieces were made not only by a small upper crust of directors […] but by a whole range of authors, whose work had previously been dismissed and consigned to oblivion.[46]

For many critical thinkers, however, equating Sarris' auteur theory with the original *politique* is unfathomable. Edward Buscombe asserts that, 'auteur theory was

[46] Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ebook.

never [itself] a theory of the cinema, though its originators did not claim that it was.'[47] According to Buscombe, the translation from the *politique* 'into "the auteur theory"' is Sarris' 'responsibility'. Unfortunately, the theory then became regarded 'as a total explanation of the cinema.'[48] In fact, the original *Cahiers* article 'was itself only loosely based upon a theoretical approach to the cinema [...] and was [only] meant to define an attitude to the cinema and a course of action.'[49] *Cahiers*' goal was to highlight cinema's standing as 'an art form like painting or poetry, offering the individual freedom of personal expression.'[50]

In the introduction to *Theories of Authorship* (2001), John Caughie notes that before the publication of the *politique*, 'the reference to the *auteur* in French film criticism had identified either the author who wrote the script, or, in the more general sense of the term, the artist who created the film. In the work of *Cahiers* the latter sense came to replace the former, and the *auteur* was the artist whose personality was "written" in the film.'[51] Caughie goes on to stress that no matter its origin, the theory of the auteur filmmaker always conforms to certain criteria. For instance, a film 'is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director [...] that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist (an *auteur*) a film is more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality', a quality apparent in all of that individual's films, constantly 'expressing his own unique obsessions'.[52] It appears then, that no matter which interpretation is taken, the main tenet of auteur theory always views the director as the author of the resulting film, and Caughie's distinctions closely encapsulate the Coen brothers' filmmaking. They produce films which express their personalities, as cultivated in public, and the remediations which they include are reflections of their own favourite works (their 'unique obsessions').

If the author of a film then is understood to be either the writer, the director, the editor, or simply the artist whose personality pervades the film, the Coen

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[47] Edward Buscombe, 'Ideas of authorship', in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by John Caughie (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), pp. 22-33 (p.22).
[48] Ibid., p. 22.
[49] Ibid., p. 22.
[50] Ibid., p. 23.
[51] John Caughie, 'Introduction', in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by John Caughie (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), pp. 9-16 (p.9).
[52] Ibid., p. 9.

brothers are certainly auteur filmmakers. Their 'unique obsessions', in the shape of remediations of the sources which influenced them, are apparent in all of their films, and they assume major control in most areas of production, meaning that the result is, above all else, a product of the Coen brothers as creators. The issue of their standing as auteurs has been addressed by several critics. Adams, however, examines the subject most thoroughly. He asserts that, over their career, they

> have become a model for the triumph of the 'indie' auteur over Hollywood. Working in tandem, the Coens write, direct and edit all their films, maintaining complete control over the finished product without interference from the movie studios with whom they partner to finance their productions [...] the Coens have enjoyed an unsurpassed degree of creative autonomy and can lay legitimate claim to being independent auteurs.[53]

Yet, as was highlighted in the exploration of auteur theory, for filmmakers to be considered as such, the generally held consensus appears to be the appearance of a common stylistic or thematic thread traceable throughout all their films.

This, however, is questionable in the case of the Coen brothers. Every one of their films remediates other sources which have influenced them, mostly though, these vary from film-to-film. The films of Preston Sturges and Hitchcock for example are near constant reference points, however, others are recalled opportunely, ensuring little repetition of individual sources throughout their works. The Coen brothers have openly constructed their career around 'a conscious effort not to repeat' themselves, a trait which Levine states makes it 'hard to pinpoint' them as filmmakers because 'their next move is always impossible to predict.'[54] This quality, manifested in a constant changing of style, genre and inspiration, itself raises a problem in claiming that the Coen brothers are auteur filmmakers.

There are, however, recurring themes evident in most of their films. Many for example address the basic notions of good and evil, usually manifested in a clash of characters; the pure Mattie chasing down the wicked Chaney in *True Grit* or the highly religious Marva Munson (Irma P. Hall) facing the morally dubious gang in *The Ladykillers*. Meanwhile, many of their films also revolve around the question of masculinity, specifically in the form of 'What kind of man are you?' These

[53] Adams, p. 1.
[54] Levine, p. 59.

philosophical preoccupations are just some examples of consistency throughout the Coen brothers' canon, but aside from the Coen name, is there really any common element which unites all their films?

According to Adams, 'One of the few consistent patterns in their development as filmmakers has been a desire to do something different in each film [...] If there is any quality that lends their oeuvre unity and consistency, it is, paradoxically, the plurality of generic styles and cultural sources they utilise to tell their stories.'[55] This lack of repetition, indeed the very inconsistency which appears to negate their standing as auteurs, is the defining trait evident throughout their work. This suggests that despite their relative originality, versatility and knowledge of cinematic history, the Coen brothers are remediative filmmakers, not traditional auteurs.

The films of the Coen brothers provide a link to cinema's history and constantly revisit and modernise classic genres and styles. Their films do not insist on a knowledge of the rest of their own works, or a familiarity with cinematic and literary history, but it does help, adding context and deeper meaning if understood. However, as their career has progressed, and they have gained critical plaudits and commercial success, it is often now the case that the brothers' attachment to a project is the main draw, as in *True Grit*, 'written for the screen and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen'.[56] They are unique filmmakers, who, as I will demonstrate, are without doubt the principal authors of their own films, but the lack of an obvious cohesive connection between each entry in their oeuvre seems to discount them from being conventional auteurs. It appears then that to label the Coen brothers in this way is as fruitless as describing them as imitators. As Adams notes, 'for all their freedom and creative control, the Coens would not define themselves as auteurs, understood as film directors who imprint their work with a unique vision articulated in a recognisable stylistic "signature".'[57]

An understanding of the Coen brothers' filmmaking and authorship then is underpinned by an exploration of postmodern sensibility rather than through auteur theory. Whilst discussing *Miller's Crossing*, Mooney cites Fredric Jameson's

[55] Adams, p. 2.
[56] *True Grit* (2010).
[57] Adams, p. 1.

thoughts on Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* and its standing in relation to an earlier cinematic version of the same story. Mooney notes that

> Jameson's words about *Body Heat* (1981) and its relation to *Double Indemnity* could not be more accurate if he were writing about [*Miller's Crossing*]: 'The word remake is anachronistic to the degree to which our awareness of the pre-existence of other versions (previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself) is now a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history.'[58]

In summary, in a postmodern world, a film which employs processes of remediation does not simply remake the sources it takes inspiration from. Instead, these remediations inform the resulting work as a fundamental and self-conscious part of it, ensuring an acknowledgment of the past, as well as a challenging of the ways Hollywood and culture remembers and views it, thus offering 'new connotation[s] of "pastness"' and originality. Therefore, the distinctive practice of remediation employed by the Coen brothers in their form of amalgamation, ensures that their films are not mere remakes, imitations, or anything inherently unoriginal. Instead, they are, paradoxically, unique works, which, in a postmodern world, display full awareness of earlier influential sources and importantly engage with them self-consciously to transcend what could otherwise be seen as 'pseudohistorical depth', becoming films with remediative value. The Coen brothers utilise forms of remediation to construct creative amalgamations of which they are the authors. They are filmmakers who use remediation to collect, preserve and engage with history and tradition through a multitude of sources.

It is telling that multiple parties directly quote Jameson when addressing the remediative nature of the Coen brothers' filmmaking. Jameson is one of the foremost writers about postmodernism, and whilst he chiefly approaches it from a Marxist political and philosophical stance, he also routinely writes on film, as well as the other art forms. Indeed, he is the perfect bridge between the existing work on the Coen brothers and my own. In the 2002 edition of his study, *The Political Unconscious*, he observes that in all areas of contemporary culture, we are

[58] Mooney, pp. 160-161.

> confronted with a choice between study of the nature of the 'objective' structures of a given cultural text (the historicity of its forms and of its content, the historical moment of emergence of its linguistic possibilities, the situation-specific function of its aesthetic) and something rather different, which would instead foreground the interpretive categories or codes through which we read and receive the text in question.[59]

Here, Jameson is suggesting a method of approaching analysis, as I am proposing in this thesis, where the actual work is not the only thing viewed. Any meaning or interpretation taken from said work should be filtered through the other works which the author may be referring to, knowingly or not. Without naming it, Jameson is advocating my theory of remediative filmmaking, where a film (instead of text) is more thoroughly understood by also evaluating the ways in which it recaptures and utilises (that is to say remediates) other influential works (from across the media spectrum) which the filmmaker has incorporated and included in their work. That is to say

> we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing in itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions. this presupposition then dictates the use of a method […] according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it.[60]

This suggests that this approach, linking to postmodern notions of originality, can only be viewed and understood through the knowledge that everything is a rewriting, reviewing (or more appropriately, a remediation) of something which already exists. Indeed, applying Jameson's words to my remediative theory, 'Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code. The identification of the latter will then lead to an evaluation of such codes, or in other words, of the "methods" or approaches current in American literary and cultural study today.'[61] Therefore, the remediative style of filmmaking demonstrated by the Coen brothers is a universal method in contemporary, postmodern cinema, and my exploration allows for a more detailed understanding of current film studies.

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[59] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. ix.
[60] Ibid., pp. ix-x.
[61] Ibid., p. x.

Types of Remediation

Having thoroughly demonstrated that the Coen brothers are models of remediative filmmakers, it is necessary to discuss the different modes of remediation which they have employed during their creative evolution. The easy misconception would be to assume that the theory of remediative filmmaking only encompasses one key type of remediation of other sources. The in-depth analysis of the Coen brothers' films that I have undertaken, however, has allowed me to identify at least four major forms of remediation in a cinematic sense. These are: direct, indirect, amalgamative and introspective remediation. Other forms may exist and become apparent in future Coen brothers films, or in the work of other filmmakers, but, for this thesis, these four seem to cover the remediation addressed.

Firstly, direct, or indeed conforming, remediation, refers to individual moments, images, scenes, or other things which have been directly remediated from another source. This is most akin to what we would consider straight adaptation. Opposing this mode is indirect, or contrasting, remediation. This form refers to those instances where a specific moment, idea or theme is a remediation of another source, but it has been altered, or otherwise reimagined, to suit the purposes of the story being told in this instance; it is no longer a direct remediation. These two forms co-exist in the entire Coen brothers' canon, with examples of both types discussed throughout the following chapters.

Partly addressed above, the third relevant mode of remediation is amalgamative. This form involves collecting those individual direct and indirect remediations and mixing them together creatively, or indeed layering them on top of each other, thereby amalgamating them into one work. Again, this is arguably evident in all their films, with one of the strongest examples in this thesis coming in the second chapter whilst addressing *Miller's Crossing*. Finally, introspective remediation refers to those remediative images, themes and contexts which are carried forward from within an artist's own body of work, here, the Coen brothers' own films. This trait has been apparent in their work since early on, with a scene from *Blood Simple* of a character vomiting being remediated in *Miller's Crossing*. However, it appears to have now become a major construct of their filmmaking, and this development will be discussed in chapter seven.

The Method in the Madness

Their career currently encompasses eighteen feature films from *Blood Simple* through to *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018) and spans thirty-five years. However, this figure only covers the films they have directed, and does not include those which they have either produced or written for others. For reasons of economy and clarity of argument, such projects are not being explored in this thesis, as it is only concerned with their style of filmmaking. This thesis would ideally analyse each of the Coen brothers' own films in detail, however, this is similarly not possible. The case studies offered will therefore only cover those works that most suitably illustrate the creative extent of the Coen brothers' remediation, as outlined below.

As Levine observes, 'the films of the Coen brothers are a feast of clever references [...] They have parodied, commented on, embraced, subverted, and renewed each genre in turn, and a fan of the brothers can never be sure what style to expect next.'[62] This highlights how the process of choosing a representative selection of the Coen brothers' eighteen films is no easy matter. The inclusions and omissions, however, have not been made randomly. In fact, a trend prominent throughout their career has determined the inclusion of certain films. Every one of the Coen brothers' films can be viewed as an amalgamation of various influences. This means that a broad consideration of remediation was not the sole criterion of selection. Instead, key common themes and inspirations, alongside modes of adapting sources, determined which films should be analysed.

Thematically speaking, the most prominently recurring motif in the Coen brothers' oeuvre comes from the influence of film noir and its roots in the hard-boiled writing of American Detective fiction. As Stanley Orr notes in his essay 'Raizing Cain: Excess Signification in *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*' (2008), the Coen brothers 'seem interested above all else in literary and cinematic noir.'[63] It was in fact with a neo-noir thriller, a later evolution of film noir, that their directorial career began. *Blood Simple* contains allusions to several films,

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[62] Levine, p. viii.
[63] Stanley Orr, 'Raizing Cain: Excess Signification in *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*', *Post Script – Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Vol. 27, Issue. 2 (Winter/Spring 2008), pp. 8-22 (p. 8).

most notably those of Hitchcock, but it is also majorly indebted to the hard-boiled writing of both Hammett and James M. Cain, two thirds of the 'holy trinity' of American Detective fiction. These two writers, along with the third in the triumvirate (Raymond Chandler), have inspired numerous Coen brothers' films, meaning that this thread of influence and remediation forms the basis for the largest portion of this thesis. Orr has rightly identified several instances where the Coen brothers have been influenced by these, and other, crime writers, however he then states that *Blood Simple* seems to merely raise Cain through an evocation of his general plots and narrative structure.[64] Whilst, his argument is convincing, he even includes reference to the film's conjuring of Hitchcockian imagery, he does not equate this with amalgamation or any theory of mixing influences together. Most crucially, however, he does not attempt to reconcile the fact that, as well as Cain, the film owes as much, if not more, to the work of Hammett. As I will demonstrate in this opening chapter, by utilising remediative practices of filmmaking, the Coen brothers' debut not only 'raises' Cain, it also summons Hitchcock and Hammett in a creative amalgamation.

Hammett's writing also acts as the principal inspiration for *Miller's Crossing*. The Coen brothers' third feature follows on from *Blood Simple* in terms of its influences, recalling and amalgamating a seemingly unending list of filmmakers and genres together with elements unmistakably inspired by Hammett's wider canon. *Miller's Crossing* could in fact be considered as a Hammett amalgamation, a product of remediating his work and others influenced by it. Other critics have touched upon this theory. For example, in his article 'Dashiell Hammett and Classical Hollywood Cinema' (2015) which reviews and analyses William H. Mooney's *Dashiell Hammett and the Movies* (2014), Robert Miklitsch labels *Miller's Crossing* as 'the contemporaneity of *The Maltese Falcon*'.[65] He also mentions Hammett's *The Glass Key* and two early film adaptations of it, noting that 'the Coen brothers gleefully raid' all of these.[66] This seems to at least be heading in the direction of remediative filmmaking as this thesis outlines, even evoking Jameson's notion of 'postmodern pastiche', and detailing that the film shows that

[64] Ibid., p. 8.
[65] Robert Miklitsch, 'Dashiell Hammett and Classical Hollywood Cinema', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 43, Issue. 2 (2015), pp. 236-240 (p. 239).
[66] Ibid., p. 239.

'affect and pastiche', as Jameson puts it, are not 'mutually exclusive.'[67] Framed through the prisms of amalgamation and remediation, as I am putting forward in this thesis, this shows what critics are continually failing to gasp when it comes to the filmmaking of the Coen brothers. In a postmodern world, their employment of remediative techniques elevates their films above notions of mere imitation, pastiche in any form and even unoriginality; they are something else, something more. As a result, these two early films, with a common inspiration moving into a more specialised and focused form of remediation, constitute the focus of the opening two chapters of this thesis, also serving to inform the next two chapters.

The Coen brothers returned to these hard-boiled roots for their seventh feature. *The Big Lebowski* is a comic take on the type of detective story associated with Chandler, and blends motifs and themes from his wider body of work together through remediation. However, as is the case with readings of *Blood Simple* and *Miller's Crossing*, the amalgamation of multiple works by one, or similar, authors is overlooked. In a 2008 article for *Clues*, Anthony Hoefer argues that *The Big Lebowski* 'invites a critical revisiting of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*; specifically, *The Big Lebowski* prompts readers to consider Chandler's novel less as a tale of a corrupt, modern city than one of the emergence of a corrupt, modern city and the resulting disappearance of an overwhelmed, mythic frontier.[68] This offers an interesting reading, but it only relates the Coen brothers' film to Chandler's most famous novel. As my argument demonstrates, it is not just *The Big Sleep* which is remediated in *The Big Lebowski*. As with their previous hard-boiled films, allusions to most of the author's other works and earlier filmic adaptations of them are included (that is to say 'revisit[ed]') in this bowling story. However, it is not just Chandler's fiction which informs the film, it also employs remediations of two more Hitchcock films and a variety of other sources from different media to inform and advance the plot. This effectively differentiates it completely from the Coen brothers' other films based on hard-boiled sources. In fact, the references within the film are so numerous and varied that it requires

[67] Ibid., p. 239.
[68] Anthony Hoefer, '"Like tumbleweed drifting across a vacant lot": The Mythic Landscape of Los Angeles in Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski*', *Clues*, Vol. 26, Issue. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 42-55 (p. 42).

particularly detailed analysis and argument, therefore, *The Big Lebowski* will be the subject of the third chapter.

Three years after thoroughly remediating Chandler, the Coen brothers once again trained their creative gaze on American Detective fiction for the fourth time with *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Shot in colour and converted to black-and-white in post-production, their ninth feature is their closest replication of the classic film noir aesthetic; as Orr states, it is their 'most ambitious investigation of the noir ethos.'[69] Importantly though, the plot of the film itself draws inspiration from multiple Cain stories. The result is a film which amalgamates the body of Cain's fiction in a similar way to what *Miller's Crossing* and *The Big Lebowski* did with Hammett and Chandler respectively. *The Man Who Wasn't There* consequently represents the culmination of the Coen brothers' relationship with film noir and its literary foundations, but it also stands as the final part of a trilogy whose primary influence (excluding the Hammett/Cain hybrid of *Blood Simple*) comes from just one of the figures of the hard-boiled trinity. It is important to note that Cain's work is the primary, but not only, source of inspiration. As with *Blood Simple* and *The Big Lebowski*, the films of Hitchcock were also influential to *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Indeed, Orr notes this, listing Cain, Hitchcock and John Huston as touchstones for the film. Unfortunately, he then states that 'The cumulative weight of these allusions serves to undercut realism with intertextuality'.[70] The truth is though, that the film's multiple remediations of various sources, genres and styles are not designed to 'undercut realism', but to, as I will show through its evocation of the socially aware film gris stylisation, allow 'an intertextual investigation of the conditions underlying identity in the modern world.'[71] This film concluded the Coen brothers' hard-boiled phase, and the first period of their career, marking it out as the logical choice for a fourth chapter which ends the first portion of this thesis.

The recurring themes and motifs of these four films, as well as their shared hard-boiled inspiration, determines their selection for detailed analysis. Despite disparate aesthetics, characters and settings, there is a common thread running through all of them. However, an argument solely focusing on the Coen brothers

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[69] Orr, p. 16.
[70] Ibid., p. 16.
[71] David Buchanan, '*The Man Who Wasn't There*: An Intertextual Investigation of Modern Identity', *Studies in the Humanities*, Vol. 37/38, Issue. 1/2 (December 2010), pp. 138-153 (p. 138).

and American Detective fiction would not have the variety or length to warrant an entire thesis, so a second commonality was identified. As with the repeated use of hard-boiled inspirations, other key themes and influences are evident throughout the Coen brothers' canon. For instance, the siblings have routinely indulged their fondness for the Western genre. Moreover, the Screwball comedy is as ubiquitous an influence in their works as both the Western and American Detective fiction, particularly in films like *Raising Arizona* (1987). Yet, despite an obvious affinity with Screwball comedy, much of the Coen brothers' inspiration in this area comes solely from the work of Sturges, so in favour of greater variety, this theme was rejected.

Instead of identifying one genre or source-specific theme to focus on in the second part of this thesis, as the first part looks at films from the first half of their canon, it logically follows that the second part should concentrate on the second half of the Coen brothers' filmmaking career. Just as the first four chapters detail one recurring source of inspiration central to their first nine films, the final three chapters of this thesis will address the nine films which currently form the second phase of their oeuvre. Until *The Man Who Wasn't There*, the Coen brothers included references to various sources of inspiration in their films in a way which added to the original story they were telling. This never crossed over into a form of direct adaptation, however, following their ninth feature, the Coen brothers appear to have become remediative adapters; a process of adapting a specific source whilst amalgamating it with other influences through the practice of creative remediation.

During promotion for *The Man Who Wasn't There* the Coen brothers spoke about their next project. Already deep into pre-production, the siblings were supposed to soon begin shooting *To the White Sea*. The film, set to star Brad Pitt, was a near-straight adaptation of James Dickey's 1993 novel, which they turned into a screenplay in 1997. Twentieth Century Fox, however, backed out at the last minute with fears over budget, locations and a lack of dialogue. To keep their career moving, they directed two films which they never intended to. The second of these, *The Ladykillers*, fits into this thesis alongside the Coen brothers' version of *True Grit*. The former, often misidentified as a simple remake of Alexander Mackendrick's *The Ladykillers* (1955), offers a more complex reading than first assumed, whilst the latter, an adaptation of the Charles Portis novel from 1968, is

often viewed as a remake of Henry Hathaway's *True Grit* (1969). Ostensibly a vehicle for John Wayne, the earlier *True Grit* does indeed provide a touchstone for the Coen brothers, but the original film is merely one source among many remediated into theirs. Wrongly dismissed as simple remakes despite being remediative amalgamations, with Adams describing both as 'disappointments' and insinuating that they are not fit to be viewed as Coen brothers films in the purest sense.[72] However, these two films together form the sixth chapter of this thesis which explores the more complex possibilities of remediative filmmaking as I show that they are amongst the most Coen of Coen brothers films.

Bridging *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *The Ladykillers*, the fifth chapter will initially focus on the adaptation of *To the White Sea*, before shifting to an analysis of the Coen brothers' most conventional adaptation to date, *No Country for Old Men* (2007). Very little has been written about their screenplay of *To the White Sea*. In fact, every source I refer to either mentions the outline of the project or discusses the reasons for its not being filmed. Indeed, nothing I have uncovered offers any insight or analysis into the actual screenplay itself, making my discussions valuable for reasons of uniqueness. On the other hand, an abundance of analysis and criticism has been devoted to their *No Country for Old Men*. The film is regarded as a faithful cinematic translation of the Cormac McCarthy novel, Ryan S. Bayliss and Allen H. Redmon stating that the 'adaptation […] is all McCarthy's, a point reviewers have been quick to celebrate.'[73] However, as I will show, this view overlooks both the Coen brothers' practice of referencing wider sources of great influence to them through the process of remediation, as well as how their earlier unsuccessful adaptation shaped and influenced this one. Conversely, this also means that my detailed analysis of the film will argue against other critics, like Alan A. Stone, who suggest that *No Country for Old Men* possesses 'few of the qualities that made the brothers the [favourites] of cineastes.'[74] I can, however, show that it is totally in keeping with the rest of their work, and therefore this film will be discussed alongside an analysis of the earlier

[72] Adams, p. 12.
[73] Ryan S. Bayliss and Allen H. Redmon, '"Just call it": Identifying Competing Narratives in the Coens' *No Country for Old Men*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Issue. 1 (2013), pp. 6-18 (p. 6).
[74] Alan A. Stone, 'Badlands', *Boston Review*, Vol. 33, Issue 3 (May/June 2008), pp. 53-54 (p. 53).

unfilmed screenplay to allow me to demonstrate how crucial *To The White Sea* is in relation to their filmmaking evolution. With chapter six, this will allow the second part of this thesis to follow the common thread of the second period of the Coen brothers' career, amalgamation as a form of adaptation.

Finally, a brief seventh chapter will address the Coen brothers' two latest films. Both *Hail, Caesar!* and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* offer a clear view of a prospective new phase of their filmmaking. Whilst the latter is formed of six apparently separate 'stories' (although a link between them can be identified), the former tells multiple tales from one fictional film studio connected by one main thread. In this way, both take the form of anthologies, and in the process remediate and re-evaluate key moments in Hollywood history, other films, and, more so than their previous sixteen films, their own back catalogue. In fact, as this final chapter will highlight, these films demonstrate a form of introspective remediation. This chapter is especially important because, very little has been written about these films as they are quite new. To simply dismiss *Hail, Caesar!* as 'a satire on movie stereotypes of Hollywood's golden age', is to overlook the remediative complexities of it.[75] Indeed, I have found no scholarly articles which offer any sort of detailed analysis of *Hail, Caesar!*, let alone one which examines it in relation to the rest of their work, as I do in this thesis. Likewise, aside from the usual reviews and publicity pieces, Jared Lucky appears to be the only person so far to have approached *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* from a scholastic perspective. Promisingly, he even highlights that it would be wrong, despite the film's violent moments, to consider it as a 'gory romp à la [Quentin] Tarantino.'[76] In his article, Lucky does indeed go into a detailed analysis of all six segments of the anthology, which 'is not a celebration of [stylised] violence […] [but, rather,] a thoughtful but imperfect effort to return to the roots of the Western genre - albeit with an offbeat, parodic sensibility.'[77] Crucially, although he notes the film's overarching theme (namely death), he does not use this to tie up all six stories, as I do, and makes no reference to their wider

[75] Brooke Allen, 'Diverse Fare', *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 69, Issue. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 94-100 (pp. 94-95).
[76] Jared Lucky, 'The Place Up Ahead: *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*', *Commonweal*, Vol. 146, Issue. 2 (January 25th 2019), pp. 28-29 (p. 28).
[77] Ibid., p. 28.

canon. It is here where my remediative examination of their works offers something new, insightful, and valuable.

Overall, this thesis will feature analysis of nine of the Coen brothers' films, alongside their most significant unfilmed project, tracing their evolution as filmmakers; and whilst each chapter does feature an exploration of the deeper purpose of their remediative style of filmmaking, suggesting a nuanced political and social context for certain recollections, the main goal of this thesis is to create a sort of catalogue of the major moments of remediation in these works. This is undertaken in the knowledge that this thesis could then form a starting point for a more in-depth study of the Coen brothers' filmmaking, which seeks solely to explore the reasoning behind their employment of remediation. Unfortunately, though, this reasoning, as outlined above, as well as the scope of this thesis, largely necessitates the exclusion of the other nine of their films, which cannot be engaged with to the same extent. As a result, the critical successes of *Barton Fink* (1991) and *Fargo* are not explored in detail, and neither is *Burn After Reading* (2008). Meanwhile, as the influence of the Screwball comedy also cannot be included, this discounts the consideration of *Intolerable Cruelty*, *Raising Arizona*, *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*.

All of these films are worthy of discussion, but as the first part of this thesis focuses on the hard-boiled inspiration of the Coen brothers' four noir films, they cannot be properly engaged with here. Similarly, as the second part concentrates on the process of adaptation and a more introspective style of remediation, the decision was taken not to address *A Serious Man* (2009). Finally, although *Inside Llewyn Davis* offers scope to argue the benefits of creative amalgamation, as it mixes the story and influence of *Peter Pan* together with *The Odyssey* and Americana (both also touchstones for *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), it was discounted in favour of named adaptations. If there were enough room in this thesis to explore each of the Coen brothers' films, an argument could be made to justify the inclusion of any one of them. An entirely different selection of films could also serve as focus for the following analysis comfortably and without detriment, yet in favour of consistency and thematic similarities, this thesis begins by discussing *Blood Simple*.

Chapter One - In the Blood: Hard-Boiled Beginnings

In 1984 the Coen brothers released their debut film. Styled as a neo-noir thriller, *Blood Simple* was anything but simple, firmly establishing their filmmaking as an exercise in creative remediation. *Blood Simple* takes inspiration from two of the three writers of American Detective fiction commonly cited as 'the trinity', a key influence on much of their output, Hammett and Cain (the third being Chandler, with his remediative influence being explored in the third chapter in relation to *The Big Lebowski*). Aside from this, however, the film also heavily recalls two of Hitchcock's films, the history of film noir through both its remediation of classic examples and its employment of an associated later style and previous uncredited screen versions of Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1929) encompassing other genres of film. It then amalgamates all of these sources together into the Coen brothers' own story through a process of remediation. Of course, it should be noted that *Blood Simple* separates the brothers on the credits, with Joel named as the sole director and Ethan listed simply as a producer. However, as Joel admitted to Hal Hinson in an interview at the time, 'the credits on the movie don't reflect the extent of the collaboration [...] I think we're both just about equally responsible for everything in the movie [...] as far as the script and the [realisation], down to the tiniest details and including all the major aesthetic decisions, that's a mutual thing.'[78]

The following chapter will address the amalgamative nature of *Blood Simple*, which sees multiple direct and indirect remediations of various sources mixed together in the resulting film. This will require detailed focus and analysis of the remediations of the different sources mentioned above, from Cain's fiction, Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and *Torn Curtain* (1966), and even Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), as well as further implications and notable minor recollections. However, the body of this chapter begins by examining the influence of Hammett's American Detective fiction on the film.

Hammett's influence is apparent even with the title of *Blood Simple*. Writing in *The New American Crime Film* (2012), Matthew Sorrento asserts that, 'Hammett's novel, *Red Harvest* – often argued to be the prototypical detective noir

[78] Hal Hinson, 'Bloodlines', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 3-16 (p. 12).

– introduced the term the Coens borrowed for their title.'[79] In *Red Harvest*, Hammett's protagonist, a character known only as the Continental Op (a private detective or operative for a national agency), becomes aware that the aptly named town of Poisonville is changing him, 'This damned burg's getting me, if I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives.'[80] The term 'blood-simple' was coined by Hammett 'to convey the state of confusion that plagues a murderer after he has killed, causing him to make mistakes.'[81]

With its foreshadowing in the title, the Coen brothers' film fully embraces Hammett's notion of this mental state, with the characters 'going blood-simple' in several ways. Not only does the title derive from one of the most recognisable pieces of dialogue in *Red Harvest*, it is also repeated throughout the film by Loren Visser (M. Emmet Walsh), who continually comments on Marty (Dan Hedaya) going simple, whilst he himself goes 'money simple'. This idea of 'going blood-simple' also implies an element of criminality induced by the climate or situation a virtuous character is caught up in; a transformation which is seen in Ray (John Getz). Ray is having an affair with Abby (Frances McDormand), who happens to be married to his boss, Marty. An increasingly bitter Marty seeks revenge, and after firing Ray, he hires Visser, a private investigator, to trail and kill the two adulterers. However, Visser double-crosses Marty and decides to kill him with Abby's gun instead. When Ray later goes to collect his final wages, he finds his former employer's lifeless body along with the gun and assumes that Abby is responsible. Acting out of love (that is to say 'going blood-simple'), Ray cleans up the scene and takes Marty's body away in his car, but whilst searching for a place to dispose of him, Marty regains consciousness. Fearing what will come if Marty lives, Ray buries him alive.[82]

Thus, the plot of *Blood Simple*, much like that of *Red Harvest*, finds its protagonist caught in a morally dubious or criminal situation. This also sees the film remediating the basic plot trajectory of many other classic examples of film noir, which in turn elevates it into the realm of hypermedia by creating a series of

[79] Matthew Sorrento, *The New American Crime Film* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), p. 164.
[80] Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2012), p. 153.
[81] Levine, p. 14.
[82] *Blood Simple*, dir. by Joel Coen (River Road Productions, 1984).

hypermediative through-lines to previous films, a link to Hollywood history. The Op fears he is 'going blood-simple' under the influence of Poisonville, and similarly the Coen brothers' own version of the phenomenon sees Ray slip into crime due to his situation. He may be sleeping with a married woman, but Ray is not portrayed as a bad man. Yet, because he loves Abby, and because he is unaware of Visser's role, he finds himself firstly complicit in an apparent murder, then committing a particularly brutal form of murder himself. In *Blood Simple*, Ray's love for Abby drives him to crime just as the Op's time in Poisonville forces him to become arguably as morally compromised as the natives in *Red Harvest*. By taking their title from Hammett's novel, the Coen brothers' film subtly recalls *Red Harvest*, but by also making the notion of 'going blood-simple' a key motif of the plot they are also remediating Hammett more directly. As Hinson summarises, *Red Harvest* shows 'that after a person kills somebody, he goes soft in the head – "blood simple" [...] Your brains turn to mush [...] For the characters in the stylish new thriller *Blood Simple*, passion, guilt, and the sight of blood on their hands causes the world to warp and distort just as Hammett said it would.'[83] Importantly, by 'going blood-simple', the character of Ray also answers one of the Coen brothers' key recurring thematic questions, 'What kind of man are you?' Answer: not a bad man, but one willing to do anything, up to and including murder, ironically out of love and a sense of duty.

Of course, as with all of the Coen brothers' films, there are other sources whose influence is evident in *Blood Simple*. Whilst the film is clearly indebted to Hammett's writing, it is also shaped by another prominent figure in American Detective fiction, Cain. In his analysis of the film, Sorrento explains that some of the key motifs from *Blood Simple* can be traced to Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934). The film's 'narrative conceit, which [the Coen brothers] reversed into a neo-noir motif, [also] comes from Cain.'[84] Discussing two of Cain's best known novels, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity* (1943), in relation to *Blood Simple*, Levine states that the Coen brothers are 'not above "borrowing" plots and even characters when it suit[s] [their stories] [...] The

[83] Hinson, p. 3.
[84] Sorrento, p. 164.

lethal triangle of husband, wife, and lover, for instance came straight from Cain's novels.'[85]

It is beyond doubt that they do 'borrow' (or have remediated) the basis for *Blood Simple* from both Hammett and Cain. Whilst the title and the wider theme of situationally inspired criminality come from Hammett, the dynamics between the film's characters instantly recalls the structure of Cain's stories. Debating the primary source of the film's inspiration in *The Coen Brothers: The Life of the Mind* (2000), James Mottram mentions that one critic referred to *Blood Simple* as a '"Hammett story filmed through a rainbow"', before stating that it 'would have been more correct to have seen the film as a story by […] Cain lit by a neon light.'[86] Filtering his argument through the film's colour palette and style (ideas of rainbow colouring and neon lighting being more closely associated with neo-noir than the earlier film noir), Mottram has touched on the fact that *Blood Simple* is neither just one or the other, but rather both. The film is, at the same time, a Hammett story and a Cain tale, an amalgamation of the two as it were. However, *Blood Simple* cannot be classed as a straight adaptation of either Hammett or Cain, instead it should be viewed as a Coen remediation. Whilst these writers are recalled throughout the film, *Blood Simple* never relies on just one or the other. Instead, it remediates certain elements from both, along with other sources, into a story of the Coen brothers' own design; it is their film. As Levine puts it:

> Of all their scripts, *Blood Simple* shows the greatest influence of its sources [...] the motivations of the plot come straight out of pulp-fiction conventions – lust, jealousy, greed [...] And yet, it is by no means without originality. The plot, though a variation on the age-old lovers' triangle, finds a new way to play it out. And the characters [...] all have something new about them.[87]

Blood Simple though is by no means only indebted to Cain and Hammett, as the Coen brothers do not simply draw on literary sources, they also routinely recall their cinematic influences.

A Hitch in the Hard-Boiled

[85] Levine, p. 14.
[86] James Mottram, *The Coen Brothers: The Life of the Mind* (London: B T Batsford, 2000), p. 25.
[87] Levine, p. 20.

Examining the origin of *Blood Simple* from a stylistic standpoint, Hinson asserts that the film is, 'Made up of equal parts film noir and Texas gothic, but with a hyperbolic B-movie veneer, it's a grab-bag of movie styles and references [...] *Blood Simple* may appear to be more about other movies than anything else, and there is an element of movie-movie formalism in [the Coen brothers'] work.'[88] Without framing his argument in any solid film theory, Hinson seems to imply that because of its make-up their first film is a work of remediation. Indeed, his idea of 'movie-movie formalism' seems to suggest remediative captures of other films, and his analysis alludes to the influence of several filmmakers whom the Coen brothers recall. Levine also picks up on this, noting one particularly influential director. Detailing the film's comedic undertones, Levine states that, 'Bringing in humour, however, was something [the siblings] had seen their literary idols, Hammett [...] and Cain do, not to mention Alfred Hitchcock, with his suspense/horror thrillers.'[89]

Blood Simple is firmly rooted in the tradition of its literary influences, but it is equally indebted to the so-called 'Master of Suspense'.[90] There is an inescapable feeling of the Hitchcockian drama in the plot of the Coen brothers' debut. According to Hinson, Hitchcock is a 'spirit hover[ing] over the film',[91] derived from the mystery, the unfaithful spouse, the murder, the subsequent cover-up, the misdirection and through to the final carnage. The channelling of the British director led some to label *Blood Simple* as '"ersatz Hitchcock", complaining that [it] was a self-conscious exercise [in homage to filmmaking itself].'[92] However, the brothers have never denied that Hitchcock was a major influence, with Jenny Jones noting that Joel even described the film 'as Hitchcockian with a touch of Chuck Jones, creator of *Looney* [*Tunes*].'[93]

Aside from the general Hitchcockian tone and feel, two of his films are specifically remediated in *Blood Simple*: *Torn Curtain* and *Psycho*. Expanding on his assertion regarding the director's influence, Levine notes that Marty's

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[88] Hinson, p. 4.
[89] Levine, p. 15.
[90] Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 117.
[91] Hinson, p. 17
[92] Mottram, p. 25.
[93] Jenny M. Jones, *The Big Lebowski: An Illustrated, Annotated History of the Greatest Cult Film of All Time* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2012), p. 18.

painstaking death 'was based on' one from *Torn Curtain*, and whilst Hitchcock 'took ten minutes of screen time to kill one of the characters; Joel and Ethan decided that Marty would last twice that long. And the film's climatic ending borrows from *Psycho*.'[94] Tackling these two Hitchcock sources separately, one can certainly see recollections of both in *Blood Simple*. Firstly, as Mottram notes, *Blood Simple* shows that 'Killing a man turns out to be hard work [...] not since [...] *Torn Curtain* [...] has it taken a man so long to die.'[95] Indeed, in the Coen brothers' film, Marty's death is prolonged, unfolds over multiple scenes and three distinct locations, and, although not an exact match, there is a striking similarity between this scene and the parallel death in *Torn Curtain*.

After he is shot and left for dead by Visser in *Blood Simple*, Marty remains sitting in his office until Ray arrives to get the money he is owed. Finding Marty lifeless and discovering Abby's gun at the scene, Ray proceeds to cover up the crime he assumes his lover has committed, mopping up the blood with his jacket before cleaning it in the washroom, finally dragging Marty to his car to dispose of the body.[96]

Figure 1 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

[94] Levine, p. 15.
[95] Mottram, p. 30.
[96] *Blood Simple*.

Figure 2 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Figure 3 - Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Whilst driving away, Ray pulls over and bolts from the car, revolted by the realisation of what is happening. However, when he regains his composure and returns to the vehicle, he discovers a blood stained and empty backseat: Marty is alive and crawling away. Ray considers running him over or smashing his skull with

a spade to keep the events of the night a secret, before the fear of being seen forces him to drag Marty back to the car. A cut then moves the action forward to a field where Ray is digging a grave for his former boss. Dumping Marty in the hole, Ray begins shovelling the dirt back on top, but the wounded man discovers the gun which Ray placed in his pocket for disposal. Marty takes aim, but the gun is empty and after Ray retrieves it, he resumes the burial, despite the muffled screams of his victim. This action fulfils the promise of the film's title, as Ray has gone 'blood-simple'. From initially acting, although mistakenly, to protect Abby, he has now consigned Marty to a horrific death, suffocating in a shallow grave.

In the Hitchcock film, the lengthy death scene takes place when Hermann Gromek (Wolfgang Kielling) follows Professor Michael Armstrong (Paul Newman) to his meeting with the mysterious Pi. The East German security officer soon discovers that Armstrong is a spy and resolves to send him to the 'big house'. However, determined that his mission must be completed, Armstrong and the Farmer's Wife (Carolyn Conwell) ensure Gromek's silence. Armstrong places the man in a choke hold and struggles with him whilst the Farmer's Wife retrieves a knife and stabs Gromek in the chest. Just like the gunshot in *Blood Simple* which left Marty alive though, this wound does not kill the German. So, the Farmer's Wife picks up a spade and repeatedly hits Gromek in the legs, making him collapse. Still refusing to die though, an increasingly bloodied Gromek continues to struggle until he is dragged to the gas oven, where he is overcome by the fumes. As the Farmer's Wife assures a dazed looking Armstrong that she will bury the body, he proceeds to the sink where he washes the blood from his hands.[97]

[97] *Torn Curtain*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Universal Pictures, 1966).

Figure 4 – Screenshot from *Torn Curtain* (1966)

Just as Ray found himself unwillingly complicit in murder in *Blood Simple*, so too does Armstrong in *Torn Curtain*. Strikingly, both men are acting out of a sense of duty, but whilst Ray is acting emotionally out of love, Armstrong is emotionlessly motivated to protect his identity and mission. This rather diametric change in reasoning for acting unlawfully suggests that the Coen brothers deliberately chose to recall the specific time and politics of Hitchcock's film to show that reasons and motivations can change due to circumstances, but senses of duty and honour can still lead to a bad place: as the proverb says, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.

This remediation also functions to draw parallels between the Cold War-era of *Torn Curtain* and the mid-1980s of *Blood Simple*, a time when the Cold War began to 'heat' up under the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. Meanwhile, the fact that the film was released in 1984 adds an Orwellian resonance to the political undertones, at least in hindsight. Both Ray and Armstrong also share a similarly human reaction of disbelief and disgust when they realise what they have done, framed in a similar way, and both are even seen washing the blood from their hands from the same camera angle and position. Clearly, Marty's prolonged death is a remediation of Gromek's tortured end in *Torn Curtain*, but *Blood Simple* also sees

the Coen brothers remediate the Hitchcock film in another, more interesting and remediatively valuable, way.

During a later scene in *Torn Curtain*, Armstrong and his fiancée Sarah Sherman (Julie Andrews) attend a ballet performance to disguise their impending exit from East Germany. However, the Prima Ballerina (Tamara Toumanova) recognises Armstrong in the audience and looks at him through a peep hole in the wings.[98]

Figure 5 – Screenshot from *Torn Curtain* (1966)

[98] Ibid.

Figure 6 – Screenshot from *Torn Curtain* (1966)

This peephole not only acts as an example of Hitchcock's predilection for including voyeuristic themes, characters and shots in his films, but it also recalls a memorable image from the finale of *Blood Simple*. With Marty taken care of, Visser decides to tie-up the loose ends. Thinking that the adulterers are going to blackmail him, he kills Ray and plans to do the same to Abby. However, in the dark about the events which have unfolded, Abby believes that Marty has come to kill her. Luring her assailant to the bathroom window, Abby stabs Visser through the hand, pinning him to the windowsill. Shooting through the wall, Visser creates multiple holes in it, hoping to be able to punch through and free his hand.[99]

[99] *Blood Simple*.

Figure 7 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Still assuming that her attacker is Marty, which also remediatively captures the sense of paranoia evident in the Cold War-era climate of *Torn Curtain*, Abby shoots through the bathroom door, killing Visser and closing the film.[100]

[100] Ibid.

Figure 8 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

The holes which Visser makes in the wall, and the final one which the kill-shot creates, closely resemble the peephole employed by the Ballerina in *Torn Curtain*. This in effect creates a remediation of the voyeuristic employment of the feature in the Hitchcock film, but in the 1980s, the voyeur is not a character from the film, it is in fact the audience, or even the filmmakers themselves. This is due to the neo-noir style lighting of *Blood Simple*'s climax, because of which, the shaft of light which emanates from each of the bullet holes is also akin to a projector beam. Aside from creating a voyeuristic effect which mirrors the function of Hitchcock's similarly shaped hole in the earlier film, this suggests that every film, indeed every source, which has influenced and been remediated in *Blood Simple* is on display here at the climax of the film, permeating their new creation and playing in the Coen brothers' 'internal cinema': a perfect emblem of remediation.

This voyeuristic design does not, however, just recall *Torn Curtain*, it also evokes another Hitchcock film. In *Psycho*, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) employs a similar peephole in order to spy on Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) whilst she undresses.[101]

[101] *Psycho*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Shamley Productions, 1960).

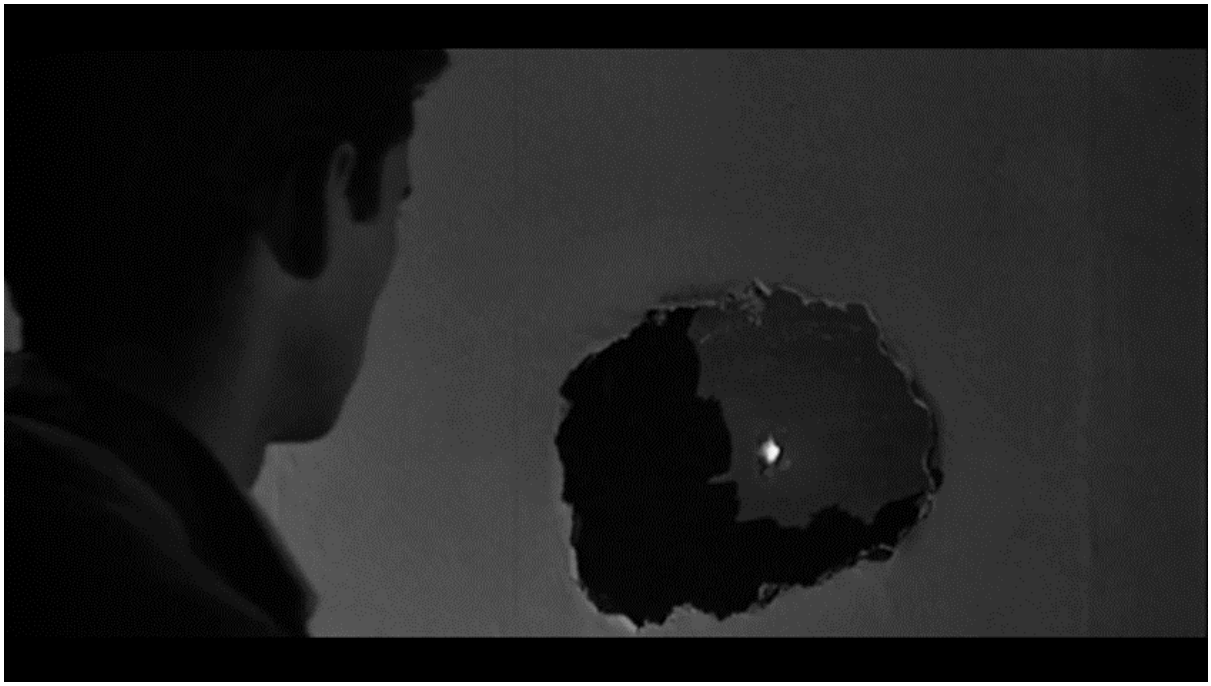

Figure 9 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

Figure 10 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

The fact that these holes appear in at least two of Hitchcock's films seems to confirm that he was consciously remediated into the finale of *Blood Simple* by the Coen brothers, as the bullet holes in the wall instantly recall the voyeuristic shots in both *Psycho* and *Torn Curtain*, whilst the projector beam effect created with the

lighting in *Blood Simple* also apparently comments on the practice of remediation. However, *Psycho* is recalled throughout *Blood Simple*, not just in the final scene.

As Joel admitted in the siblings' 2001 interview with McKenna, '*Psycho* [along with *Shadow of a Doubt* [(1943)] is probably my favourite Hitchcock film.'[102] After the infamous shower scene in *Psycho*, where Norman kills Marion, he cleans the bathroom, mopping up and washing away the blood.[103]

Figure 11 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

[102] McKenna, p. 179.
[103] *Psycho*.

Figure 12 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

Linking this scene to that in *Blood Simple* where Ray cleans up following Marty's supposed murder, Ryan Doom asserts that, 'Ray understands the situation when he finds Abby's [gun] [...] [but] [h]e never wavers in cleaning up the mess. [And similarly] [i]n *Psycho*, Norman [...] finds mopping up blood difficult, but Ray lacks a mop or even basic cleaning supplies [...] He soaks it up but the blood drips, leaving a bigger mess.'[104] As Doom realises, there are major similarities between the two scenes, and clearly this is another instance where *Blood Simple* is remediating *Psycho*. Norman drags Marion's body out of the bathroom in the Hitchcock film, just as Ray shifts Marty in the Coen brothers' debut. Both men end up with blood on their hands, and both subsequently try to wash it off in the sink. The films then show their respective characters somewhat ineffectively wiping the blood off the floor, before finally both Norman and Ray transfer the bodies to their cars for disposal. This connection raises the possibility that the Coen brothers are also linking Hammett's notion of 'going blood-simple' to *Psycho*'s Norman. By doing so it suggests that they are using remediative technique to comment on the perception of psychology as presented in most Hollywood films, as well as in wider American

[104] Ryan P. Doom, *The Brothers Coen: Unique Characters of Violence* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), p. 10.

society, prompting a re-evaluation of it. In this light, Norman is also a victim of his environment, and his killings are a symptom of his own version of 'going blood-simple', rather than as a result of his mother issues.

Psycho also remediatively informs the scene where Ray cleans up Marty's supposed death, but the Coen brothers' film also recalls other moments from the Hitchcock film, with these further remediations adding interesting context to the images in the later film. For instance, when Marion first flees Phoenix after stealing the $40,000 she was meant to deposit at the bank in *Psycho*, her drive ends when the headlights of passing cars begin to blind her. A similar effect is again employed as she approaches Bates Motel, the disorientating brightness of the headlights combining with the torrents of near-vertical rain to force Marion to seek shelter.[105]

Figure 13 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

[105] *Psycho*.

Figure 14 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

Figure 15 – Screenshot from *Psycho* (1960)

As noted by Stephen Rebello in his study on the making of *Psycho*, the film's screenwriter Joseph Stefano described how Hitchcock wanted to shoot Marion's

final journey to Bates Motel, ‘like a heavily [stylised] descent into the underworld’.[106] If the rain and the glare of headlights represent Marion’s descent into hell, the same motifs are also evident in *Blood Simple*, in this case symbolising Ray’s moral decline. The Coen brothers’ film opens with Ray and Abby parked in a car discussing Marty and their relationship. As they talk, the wipers move back and forward to try and clear the pouring rain, whilst the headlights from passing cars disorientate the audience with brightness.[107]

Figure 16 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

[106] Stephen Rebello, ’Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of *Psycho*’, in *Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho: A Casebook*, ed. by Robert Kolker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 30-56 (p. 49).
[107] *Blood Simple*.

Figure 17 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

This opening scene climaxes with Ray and Abby having sex in a motel, beginning the chain of events which lead to Marty's death and the film's bloody finale. In these terms, this specific remediation of *Psycho* can be interpreted as marking the start of Ray's own descent into the moral underworld by means of its visual match to Marion's drive towards Bates Motel in the Hitchcock film. Similarly, the dazzling effect of the on-coming headlights is also apparent during Ray's drive with the apparently lifeless Marty, the brightness seemingly exposing Ray's own guilt and mirroring his moral downturn.[108]

[108] Ibid.

Figure 18 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Figure 19 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

These examples show that, when making their first feature, the films of Hitchcock were used as sources, remediated by the Coen brothers, but another director's work is also remediated in *Blood Simple*.

A Stranger Walks into a Bar

Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* is another reference point, and interestingly, it too, much like *Blood Simple*, takes inspiration from *Red Harvest*. As Robert Cumbow asserts, 'The structure, theme, and amoral-comic tone [of *A Fistful of Dollars*] owe a debt to Dashiell Hammett's [novel].' [109] Although Leone often cites the 'eighteenth-century comic dramatist Carlo Goldoni's *Arlecchio servo di due padroni* (*The Servant of Two Masters*)' as the original source of the story,[110] nonetheless *A Fistful of Dollars* can be viewed as an uncredited transposition of Hammett. This seminal Spaghetti Western centres on the laconic Man With No Name (Clint Eastwood) as he arrives in a Mexican border town caught in the middle of a violent feud between two families. This mirrors the plot of Hammett's novel where the Continental Op, also a man with no name, arrives in Poisonville and finds himself involved in a gang war. In both *Red Harvest* and *A Fistful of Dollars*, the protagonists play loose with their allegiances, creating situations which destroy both sides. Ultimately, they are serving themselves as well as the town by getting rid of both of the evil influences who battle for control of it.

In *Blood Simple*, the Coen brothers recall *A Fistful of Dollars* during Ray's first trip to Marty's bar. Ray enters wearing a donkey-brown coloured checked shirt and approaches the bar purposefully as the camera slowly dollies in, matching his stride.[111]

[109] Robert C. Cumbow, *The Films of Sergio Leone* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2008), p. 14.
[110] Ibid., p. 14.
[111] *Blood Simple*.

Figure 20 – Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

On reaching the bar, the bartender Meurice (Samm-Art Williams) welcomes him by saying ‘Howdy stranger’. Itself a seeming cliché of the Western (offering another example of the Coen brothers’ remediation of the history of filmmaking itself and yet more hypermediative links to other films), Meurice offers this greeting in humour, but by implying that Ray is a stranger he is evoking the memory of The Man With No Name. Leone’s protagonist is also known as the Stranger, and arrives on screen wearing a brown poncho, similar in colour and style to Ray’s shirt.[112]

[112] *A Fistful of Dollars*, dir. by Sergio Leone (Constantin Film, 1964).

Figure 21 – Screenshot from *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)

With this subtle reference towards *A Fistful of Dollars*, the Coen brothers are once again adding meaning to their film though remediation. The coupling of Ray and The Man With No Name also indirectly links the character back to Hammett's Continental Op. Therefore, the Coen brothers are once again allowing the influence of *Red Harvest* to permeate *Blood Simple*, this time through the filter of another film.

Yet, as has been illustrated throughout this chapter, *Blood Simple* is an exercise in exhibiting the influence of other films as much as literature, and this is also true with *A Fistful of Dollars*. Leone's film is often seen as not just an uncredited adaptation of *Red Harvest*, but also as an uncredited remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961). Whilst addressing the cinematic afterlife of Hammett's novel, David Sterritt notes that

> while nobody has filmed *Red Harvest* under its rightful name, two directors appear to have tapped it indirectly: Kurosawa, who dressed it in samurai garb, and Leone, who was doubly indirect, since he drew upon Kurosawa's movie rather than Hammett's book. 'Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* was inspired by an American novel [...] so [by retelling it as a

> Western] I was really taking the story back home again,' Leone remarked.[113]

The fact that Leone's film is 'a sometimes shot-for-shot remake' of Kurosawa's film,[114] which itself does not acknowledge the influence of *Red Harvest*, gives the Coen brothers' film a rich and convoluted lineage of sources. As well as taking the title for *Blood Simple* from *Red Harvest*, the siblings are also indirectly remediating the novel again through references to *A Fistful of Dollars*, a film seen as a retelling of *Yojimbo*, which is itself an uncredited adaptation of *Red Harvest*.

In *Blood Simple* then, it seems that for the Coen brothers, all roads lead to Hammett, as even some of their remediations of other films indirectly recall the author. This statement about Hammett is also true of their third film, *Miller's Crossing*. This chapter has explored the ways in which *Blood Simple* already showcases the Coen brothers' distinctively remediative style of filmmaking in their debut feature. Whilst this is expressed through both direct and indirect remediations of Hammett's work itself and further cinematic versions of it, these moments are also amalgamated together with some striking remediations of two Hitchcock films, neo-noir stylings and an original story influenced by the writing of Cain; creating a film which should be viewed as an amalgamative remediation. Strikingly, the collective remediation of hard-boiled influences which originated in the era of America's great Depression alongside those of a classic Hitchcockian-take on Cold War espionage mix together with the Coen brothers' own contemporary setting and style to create what could be seen as a disguised commentary on the political and social climate of contemporary America. This means that, although *Blood Simple* contains familiar themes, motifs and images, the process of remediation delivers a new slant on them: a sentiment ably expressed twice in the film itself when The Four Tops 'It's The Same Old Song' (1965) features on the soundtrack, including, most notably, over the end credits. As the lyrics note, 'Now it's the same old song / But with a different meaning / Since you been gone'.[115] The influence of Hitchcock will be addressed again in following chapters, as too will the remediation of Cain in relation to *The Man Who Wasn't*

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[113] David Sterritt, *The Cinema of Clint Eastwood: Chronicles of America* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), p. 40.
[114] Cumbow, p. 14.
[115] *Blood Simple*.

There, but the next chapter discusses the further remediation and amalgamation of Hammett's work.

Chapter Two - 'Well, we'll go out to Miller's Crossing…': The Hammett Amalgamation

It is known that the Coen 'brothers like to begin with a genre and then subvert it for their own purposes', Ethan himself has stressed their 'conscious effort not to repeat' themselves when making future films.[116] Yet, although it is presented as a gangster film as opposed to the neo-noir thriller of their debut, *Miller's Crossing*, their third feature, also takes its inspiration from Hammett, just as *Blood Simple* did. On this occasion though, Hammett's is the sole influence from the American Detective tradition who shapes the film. Ethan freely admits that the screenplay 'is pretty much just a shameless rip-off of Dashiell Hammett, mostly his novel *The Glass Key*, but to a lesser extent *Red Harvest*. More than anything else it was an enthusiasm for Hammett's writing that was the genesis of [the] movie. It's Hammett – in a word, that's what it is.'[117] This use of the author's name as a descriptive noun provides the best indicator of what the film sets out to do. As this chapter shows, *Miller's Crossing* does not present an adaptation of these, or indeed other Hammett, works, but rather captures the spirit of his literary fictions, combining this with recollections of classic films and sentimental music to create a film which is, in one word, Hammett. To show this, this chapter will analyse the remediation in *Miller's Crossing* of multiple sources, including a film noir adaptation of *The Glass Key* (1942) directed by Stuart Heisler, Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars*, and even Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), as well as the Coen brothers' near ubiquitous favourite, Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels* (1941). However, most crucial to the amalgamation of remediations that inform *Miller's Crossing* are several of Hammett's works of fiction.

Elaborating on this, Levine notes that *Miller's Crossing* is a 'good story – which it ought to [be] since much of it was borrowed from Dashiell Hammett himself. While the idea of a town on the take came from Hammett's *Red Harvest*, much of the narrative was lifted from the 1931 novel *The Glass Key*.'[118] Yet, whilst this acknowledges the impact of the two specified novels, *Miller's Crossing* contains

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[116] Levine, p. 59.
[117] Nicholas Patterson, 'Gates of Ethan', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 119-126 (p. 120).
[118] Levine, p. 61.

links to most of Hammett's other works. Writing about the film retrospectively in *The Guardian*, Jason Deans humorously observes that the protagonist Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne) is a rather unreliable hero: 'OK, so he's an asshole. But he's an asshole who abides by his own set of rules, no matter what.'[119] This description appears to sum up the Coen brothers' protagonist, but it is just as applicable to many of Hammett's central characters. In fact, the sentiment of this statement recalls Sam Spade, the private investigator from his earlier novel *The Maltese Falcon*. As Jule Selbo notes, Spade is an 'anti-hero, [who] has an amoral code that he lives by; he works by himself, doesn't get along with anybody [...] and distrusts everyone. The character has a dry ironic wit and clearly sees the world as a dangerous, unfeeling, wretched setting for selfish and greedy characters.'[120] If one were to substitute Reagan for Spade in Selbo's analysis then it would closely resemble Deans' summation of the film character, and vice-versa. Yet, despite the similarity between Tom and Hammett's protagonist, Nigel Andrews still insists that the film manages to present 'a world [turned] into a wilderness without a hero. There is no Sam Spade to offer hardboiled moral guidance... this is Hammett without the Prince.'[121] I would argue that this is patently incorrect and that Tom is the 'hero', who, through the film's remediation of gang-led, prohibition-era America, is caught up in several uncomfortable situations like a true Hammett protagonist. As such, there is no quick solution, no easy way out, but he does what he can to ensure the most favourable outcome, even if it is not the best for himself, marking him out as a postmodern evolution of Hammett's 'Prince'. There is little doubt that *The Maltese Falcon* had an influence on *Miller's Crossing*, and the Coen brothers' film nods to yet another of Hammett's novels in an even more direct manner, with the name of one of the antagonists. Referred to throughout the film as 'the Dane' or simply 'Dane', Eddie Dane's (J.E. Freeman) presence calls to mind Hammett's *The Dain Curse* (1929), the follow-up to *Red Harvest*.

Miller's Crossing, though, is mostly indebted to *The Glass Key*, with Levine even commenting that, 'Hammett's protagonist, Ned Beaumont, became the

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[119] Jason Deans, 'My favourite film: *Miller's Crossing*', *The Guardian*, Friday 30th December 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/dec/30/my-favourite-film-millers-crossing [date accessed: 1st November 2014].
[120] Jule Selbo, *Film Genre for the Screenwriter* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 219.
[121] Mottram, p. 61.

Coens' Tom Reagan [...] He was the Coens' first really intelligent character, a man who needed to outthink everyone else and quickly, so that he was always a step ahead'.[122] However, Hammett's other writings are also remediated into the film, with much of his oeuvre alluded to at different times throughout. According to Joel, Tom is 'the quintessential Hammett guy,' with Ethan affirming Deans' assumption that the character has 'got principles and interest, [but] I don't think he's a pure man.'[123] So, even though *Blood Simple* does take inspiration from *Red Harvest*, it is actually *Miller's Crossing* which becomes the Coen brothers' most overt remediation of Hammett's canon.

Despite their obvious reverence for, or 'fascination' 0with,[124] Hammett, however, they also offer their own twists (indirect remediations) on the themes of his writing, and this is evident from the very first shot of *Miller's Crossing*. The opening paragraph of *The Glass Key* describes the way, 'Green dice rolled across the green table, struck the rim together, and bounced back. One stopped short holding six white spots in two equal rows uppermost. The other tumbled out to the centre of the table and came to rest with a single spot on top.'[125] As the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that it is Hammett's protagonist Ned who is rolling the dice, and this introduction, described in a very cinematic fashion, establishes the character's gambling vice, for as he later casually remarks, 'I don't believe in anything, but I'm too much of a gambler not to be affected by a lot of things.'[126] However, whilst Hammett uses his opening to emphasise Ned's gambling, the Coen brothers use their first shot to connect Tom with another form of addictive behaviour. Over the opening production credits, the only sound is that of ice being scooped up, and the first shot of the film shows it being deposited into a glass. Two more ice cubes (now obviously a surrogate for the dice) are clinked into the tumbler and whisky is poured in whilst the camera pulls out as voices become audible on the soundtrack. An unidentified hand collects the glass, before the shot cuts away

[122] Levine, p. 61.
[123] Ibid., p. 61.
[124] Bradley L. Herling, 'Ethics, Heart, and Violence in *Miller's Crossing*', in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 125-146 (p. 125).
[125] Dashiell Hammett, *The Glass Key* (London: Pan Books, 1975), p. 11.
[126] Ibid., p. 183.

to refocus on the source of the dialogue that began after the opening shot of the ice.[127]

Whilst Johnny Casper (Jon Polito) airs his opinions on ethics and gambling, the man with the drink remains an unfocused presence in the background, but as the camera centres on Casper, the figure walks towards the frame, the rattling of the ice cubes again becoming audible with his growing closeness. The mystery man then repositions himself behind the seated Leo O'Bannon (Albert Finney), before finally drawing the camera up to his level by raising his glass, thus revealing his identity as Tom only when he chooses to take a drink.[128] In this opening, the Coen brothers have replaced Hammett's gambling imagery with one which symbolises the importance of alcohol. This is much more in keeping with their story, as they chose to portray their protagonist as 'a near-alcoholic', with Joel even objecting to him 'leaving a glass of liquor half finished: "No, no, Tom would never leave a drink in the bottom of the glass."'[129] This change of imagery also carries greater remediative value, as it quickly establishes a link between the criminal world and alcohol, as was true in prohibition-era America, where gangsters often illegally supplied communities with alcohol. It also unmistakeably identifies that these men are criminals, partly lessening audience sympathy, and preparing them for an unhappy ending, both remediating and hypermedia0ting wider Hollywood history and the conventions of the Hays Code, where a film could not let criminals get away with their actions. The fact that the opening shots are shaped by alcohol is also fitting, because, as Deans notes, 'The movie is soaked in booze, from the opening [close up] of Tom's whisky glass and the clink-clink sound of ice cubes tumbling in.'[130] *The Glass Key* begins with imagery of the gambling which is central to the story (it is a gambling debt which leads to Ned's involvement in the investigation of the key murder). However, in *Miller's Crossing* it is the alcohol which is so fundamental to Tom's character that opens the film in a scene which takes place above Leo's primary business, a bar. This illustrates how this style of filmmaking is one of remediation, as the Coen brothers take inspiration from other sources, yet make the corresponding scene their own.

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[127] *Miller's Crossing*, dir. by Joel Coen (Circle Films, 1990).
[128] Ibid.
[129] Levine, p. 61.
[130] Deans.

This opening scene also demonstrates that, as creative filmmakers, they are willing to alter the order of key events from their sources of remediation to better suit their own storytelling. In the Hammett novel, Ned and his boss, Paul Madvig, have a similar meeting with a rival kingpin, Shad O'Rory, and his associate, Jeff, but it occurs nearly halfway through *The Glass Key*.[131] Yet, as with *Miller's Crossing*, Heisler's early film noir adaptation of *The Glass Key* also orders events differently, with this pivotal meeting taking place following an expository opening scene. In Heisler's film, the conversation between his Shad replacement Nick Varna (Joseph Calleia) and Paul (Brian Donlevy) moves the plot forward as Jonathan Latimer's screenplay dispenses with much of the gambling subplot (due to censorship) which drives the novel.[132] The Coen brothers also streamline the plot of their story by similarly using the exchange between their renamed Leo and Casper as the opening to the film, providing the impetus for the tale of gang warfare which ensues. Not only does this show their ability to rearrange the order of events according to their own purposes, but it also demonstrates the layered nature of their films' remediation. When they base a film on a literary source, they are also aware of other cinematic adaptations, as by using the meeting between the rival bosses as the opening scene of *Miller's Crossing*, they are remediating the order of, and therefore also hypermediating, Heisler's *The Glass Key*.

The Answer is Blowing in the Wind

The opening scene of the film also features an image which is a recurring motif of *Miller's Crossing*, that of a hat. After Tom positions himself behind Leo, the reverse shot of Casper retreats from its close-up perspective and adopts a medium distance. It is during this shot that a man is revealed to be standing behind Casper's right shoulder, and just as with Tom standing behind the seated Leo, only part of the torso and one arm of the man is visible. However, whereas Tom was holding his whisky, the other man is seen holding a hat. With the camera then above the seated men following Tom's 'reveal', the shot then cuts to a similar reverse angle as the Dane slowly raises his head. He directs his gaze at Tom, prompting the camera to return to him as he matches the Dane's stare. Now, with the full layout of the meeting established, the camera adopts a low angle to show Casper and the

[131] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, pp. 74-77.
[132] *The Glass Key*, dir. by Stuart Heisler (Paramount Pictures, 1942).

Dane together for the first time, and in the next shot to show Tom and Leo sharing the screen.[133]

These shots not only establish the film's power dynamics, Tom is to Leo as the Dane is to Casper, but the Dane's fixed look at Tom also serves as a hint to the conflict between these two men. After Casper accuses Leo of giving him 'the high hat' (disrespecting him), just one of the examples of the film's 'at-first-impenetrable, hard-boiled, rat-a-tat dialogue' which is a trademark of American Detective fiction,[134] he and the Dane exit wearing their hats, with a third disembodied hat appearing behind them on a coat stand.[135]

Figure 22 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

As Tom then departs, he dons his own hat. The final image before he shuts the office door, thus necessitating a cut, is of him with a hat hanging on the other side of the door.[136]

[133] *Miller's Crossing*.
[134] Deans.
[135] *Miller's Crossing*.
[136] Ibid.

Figure 23 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

This scene informs the importance of the imagery of the hat throughout the film, and the fact that the final shot of the opening features both Tom and an unworn hat carries greater significance upon further analysis; as immediately after he closes the door, the screen cuts to black before fading into the opening titles.

When originally conceiving *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen brothers began 'with an image; in this case, that of a hat blowing away in the woods. This enigmatic symbol was ultimately used for the title sequence, as [the hat] "tumbles away from us... until it disappears".'[137] Indeed, following the cut from Tom closing the door, the screen transitions into a wooded area, where the camera, focused directly upwards, pans along the tree line whilst the cast credits appear. The screen then dissolves from the upper level of the wooded area to ground level. Mirroring the closing image of the opening scene, a disembodied hat then falls directly in front of the camera, before it is carried off by the wind.[138]

[137] Mottram, p. 55.
[138] *Miller's Crossing*.

Figure 24 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Figure 25 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

As it disappears into the distance the scene cuts back to Tom awakening from a dream, at which point he realises that his own hat is missing, suggesting a link between the two, which will be discussed at greater length shortly. The imagery of the disembodied hat, coupled with the disappearance of Tom's own, lends a mysterious quality to the events of *Miller's Crossing*, also foreshadowing its

significance to the film, and the debate over its true import following its release. In fact, the mystery of the hat dominates audiences' perception of the film, and as William Rodney Allen notes, many interviews with the brothers 'seem to [focus on] one big question [...] what's with the hat?'[139]

In his analysis of *Miller's Crossing*, Deans classes the mercurial 'hat blowing away [...] which appears at the end of the opening credits' as the film's MacGuffin,[140] which, according to Slavoj Zizek, is an object of 'pure pretext whose sole role is to set the story in motion but which is in itself "nothing at all" – the only significance of the MacGuffin lies in the fact that it has some significance for the characters.'[141] Given this, the description of the hat as a MacGuffin seems apt, especially as when questioned about the hat's significance by Jean-Pierre Coursodon, Joel replied, 'Everybody asks us questions about that hat, and there isn't any answer really. It's not a symbol, it doesn't have any particular meaning', with Ethan then emphasising that 'the hat doesn't "represent" anything. It's just a hat blown by the wind.'[142] Various theories have been put forward addressing what significance the hat holds; is it a symbol of protection, a premonition of future events, or just a meaningless object? An argum0ent can be made for any of these interpretations, however, giving the hat the status as the enigmatic MacGuffin is very appropriate in a film inspired by Hammett, 'as the best example of a MacGuffin is the statue [...] in [...] *The Maltese Falcon*.'[143]

The presentation of the mysterious hat as a meaningless object is apparently later confirmed when Tom reveals that the blowing hat of the opening was from the dream he awoke from when the credits ended. Following a tryst with Leo's lover, Verna (Marcia Gay Harden), Tom admits to her that he is being kept awake by: 'A dream I had once. I was walking in the woods, I don't know why. Wind kept moving, blew me hat off.'[144] This is a fairly accurate description of the mysterious opening credit sequence, suggesting that the blowing hat may

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[139] William Rodney Allen, 'Introduction', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. ix-xxiv (p. xiii).
[140] Deans.
[141] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 163.
[142] Jean-Pierre Coursodon, 'A Hat Blown by the Wind', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 41-45 (p. 44).
[143] Sam McCarver, *Novel Writing for Wanna-Be's* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), p. 111.
[144] *Miller's Crossing*.

represent something deeper. However, the Coen brothers then 'casually dismiss' any significance the hat may have possessed, 'with [a] slice of black humour. [For as] Verna analyses the dream and asks if when he caught up with the hat it had changed into "something wonderful". [Tom replies] "Nah, it stayed a hat. And no I didn't chase it [...] Nothing more foolish than a man chasing his hat."'[145] Tom's denial of the hat's importance would seem to confirm that the object is the film's MacGuffin, as it represents nothing at all, 'it [simply] stayed a hat'. However, given the remediative through-line which the hat imagery in *Miller's Crossing* takes from its significance in Hammett's *The Glass Key*, it may have a greater importance nevertheless.

Indeed, the inclusion of a MacGuffin in *Miller's Crossing* could simply be another way of recalling Hammett's work, but it also completely alters the significance attached to the hat in *The Glass Key*. In the novel, it is the murdered Taylor Henry's missing hat which becomes the key motif, titles a section of the book, and is the piece of evidence which the entire plot revolves around. The Coen brothers' hat may be dismissed as being meaningless to the film's story, but its inclusion actually serves as another example of their style of remediation. It might be laughed off by Tom, and the Coen brothers themselves, as meaningless, but by incorporating the imagery of the hat into their film, the siblings do attach some sort of meaning to it, otherwise they would not have chosen to remediate it. This is what a remediative style of filmmaking creates, every detail, big or small, imported into a film from another source is of further interpretive value.

As Levine notes, 'they even used [*The Glass Key*] as a source for all the hat imagery that would have the critics scratching their heads; Chapter Two of Hammett's novel is actually called "The Hat Trick."'[146] Indeed, it is the missing hat in *The Glass Key* which adds a layer of mystery to the death of Taylor Henry. In *Miller's Crossing*, however, it is another missing item which informs the equivalent murder. In a moment which utilises the Coen brothers' 'omnipresent black humour',[147] a young boy and his dog discover a dead body with a gunshot wound in his chest. Instead of getting help, the youngster prods the corpse's head,

[145] Deans.
[146] Levine, p. 61.
[147] Rodney Allen, p. x.

dislodging his toupee. Removing the hairpiece, the boy and his dog run away, leaving the now bald dead man, incidentally called Rug, where he was.[148] In his analysis of the film, Herling likens the toupee's removal to the removal of a hat, suggesting that they belong to a similar 'frame of symbolic reference', in that 'The removal of head coverings [in *Miller's Crossing*] is a sign of vulnerability and lack of control.'[149] Indeed, the dead man's absent wig does provoke the same sort of confused logic as Taylor's missing hat does in *The Glass Key*, with Leo remarking that 'They took his hair Tommy. Jesus, that's strange... Why would they do that?'[150] This moment of macabre humour again highlights how the Coen brothers creatively alter narrative details from the sources of their inspiration, remediating them into their own films in a manner more attuned to their storytelling needs. However, Herling's rather attuned analysis of the significance and protective purpose of head coverings in the film also suggests that the Coen brothers are also being coy and deliberately misleading when dismissing the hat as meaningless. The significance of the disembodied hats has returned to the Coenverse in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, apparently confirming that it is not just meaningless imagery, and I shall address this in chapter seven.

Immediately after the dead man's toupee is stolen, another narrative device from *The Glass Key* is matched, again directly evoking Hammett. Twice, the novel presents the text in the form of newspaper articles. These supposed documentary excerpts cover the book's murders, and both include mock banner headlines. The first, covering the death of Taylor, notes 'BODY OF SENATOR'S SON FOUND IN CHINA STREET', before the text launches into speculation about the cause of death and further detail about the discovery.[151] The second informs the reader, as well as the protagonist, of the murder of Francis West.[152] Highlighting the scope of the remediation of Hammett in *Miller's Crossing*, immediately after the dead man is robbed of his toupee, the scene cuts to a close shot of Tom reading a newspaper.

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[148] *Miller's Crossing*.
[149] Herling, p. 144.
[150] *Miller's Crossing*.
[151] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, pp. 23-24.
[152] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

The front page of *The Evening Post* carries the story of a 'Gangland Slaying' in which a 'Politician's "Aide" [is] Found Dead in [an] Alley'.[153]

Figure 26 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Not only does this moment retrospectively inform the previous scene by identifying Rug's position in the hierarchy, it also serves as a remediative echo of *The Glass Key*. In yet another example of the filmmakers' humour though, Tom is not reading the gruesome article on the front page. As the camera presents the headline of a 'Gangland Slaying', Tom's hat can be seen over the top of the newspaper. Whilst the audience is preoccupied with the murder victim, Tom is studying the back page, and as he puts the paper down and exits the camera focuses on what caught his attention: an injury to a racehorse.[154]

[153] *Miller's Crossing*.
[154] Ibid.

Figure 27 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

This moment, unquestionably inspired by *The Glass Key*, once again highlights the Coen brothers' ability to create their own twists through indirect remediations of their sources, a trait which defines their filmmaking.

Whilst this is another reference to *The Glass Key*, the following scene features a moment which illustrates that *Miller's Crossing* sees the Coen brothers remediate several works from Hammett's oeuvre. Echoing *Red Harvest*, Tom heads to Leo's club in the wake of Rug's murder. After an argument with his boss, Tom marches into the ladies' room to confront Verna, and finds her sitting in a full-length green chiffon dress. Following their conversation, she exits, the head-to-toe nature of the garment's colour fully visible as she walks away.[155]

[155] Ibid.

Figure 28 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Verna's role as lover to both Leo and Tom, as well as her duplicitous nature, makes her the film's closest representation of the archetypal femme fatale. Not only does this create further hypermediative links to every film noir that features a similar character, her appearance in head-to-toe green here also remediates the initial description of Mrs Willsson, the most obvious femme fatale of *Red Harvest*. The Continental Op describes how, 'While I was explaining that I had an appointment with [Mr Willsson] a slender blonde woman of something less than thirty in green crepe came to the door [...] Mrs Willsson stretched her green-slippered feet out.'[156] Although this passage does not represent a perfect match to the presentation of Verna, it is similar enough to confirm that her portrayal as the femme fatale of *Miller's Crossing* highlights the influence of most of Hammett's oeuvre on the film. Verna's appearance in a film chiefly inspired by *The Glass Key* also clearly recalls the first appearance of Mrs Willsson in *Red Harvest*.

Miller's Crossing again shows the Coen brothers' willingness to creatively alter and rearrange vital moments from *The Glass Key* in Tom's apparent defection to Casper's side. In Hammett's novel, Ned decides to meet with O'Rory following a public scuffle with Paul over his handling of his rival. Despite O'Rory's offers of

[156] Hammett, *Red Harvest*, pp. 2-3.

retribution, protection and bribery, Ned is 'not so God-damned hot' about switching sides and 'going over' to his former enemy. When he tries to reject the offers and leave, he is set upon by O'Rory's dog.[157] Following the animal attack, O'Rory has Ned taken captive and beaten by two of his thugs in the hope he will give up information on Paul. He is savagely treated, before eventually starting a fire and escaping by jumping from a window, without ever joining O'Rory's gang.[158]

This violence follows Ned's decision to seek out O'Rory, and, crucially, he never switches sides. In *Miller's Crossing*, however, the Coen brothers rearrange events so that the coercion comes first, before Tom and Leo fight and he then seemingly allies himself with Casper. Tom is picked up by two of Casper's men, Frankie (Mike Starr) and Tic-Tac (Al Mancini), who escort him to their boss, who then proposes that Tom leaves Leo and switch sides. Offering the same combination of revenge and bribery employed in the novel, Casper assures a reluctant Tom that 'if you don't do this thing you won't be in any shape to walk out of here.' Unfazed, Tom refuses to ally himself with Casper, prompting the gang boss to exit, leaving Tom alone with the menacing figure of Frankie.[159] Incidentally, the inclusion of this character should also be viewed as an allusion to *The Glass Key* as Frankie's screen presence in *Miller's Crossing* seems to be a close match to Hammett's description of O'Rory's enforcer Jeff, who is 'a bow-legged ruffian [...] a swarthy man with something apish in the slope of his big shoulders, the length of his thick arms, and the flatness of his face.'[160] However, this is where the two characters' similarities end, as the Coen brothers quickly defuse Frankie's intimidating persona, as Tom distracts him and hits him with a chair. Frankie retreats from the room, returning with Tic-Tac. Tom copies his earlier tactics and swings the chair, only for Tic-Tac to catch it, before the two thugs start to work on Tom. The beating, however, does not last long. As soon as Tom hits the floor, the police, under Leo's control, storm into the room as he is knocked out, prompting a cut to black.[161]

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[157] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, pp. 85-93.
[158] Ibid., pp. 93-100.
[159] *Miller's Crossing*.
[160] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, p. 74.
[161] *Miller's Crossing*.

Suggesting that this sequence has been shot using point-of-view, the scene cuts back in from the black screen as an officer dunks Tom in water to revive him, and in the ten seconds he has been unconscious the tables have turned, with Casper's heavies now being beaten by the police. In *The Glass Key*, Ned willingly goes to see O'Rory before he is beaten, and following his escape undertakes a course of action to bring down those responsible. In *Miller's Crossing*, however, the Coen brothers invert the order of events, having Tom receive his beating first before he goes over to Casper after falling out with Leo.

The Thompson Jitterbug

Miller's Crossing also highlights the Coen brothers' willingness to change which character key events happen to, another mode of indirect remediation. As discussed above, *The Glass Key* sees Ned escape his beating by starting a fire and jumping out of a window. However, in *Miller's Crossing* it is Paul's counterpart Leo who uses a blaze to flee his would-be assassins, in the process remediating another film inspired by Hammett's fiction which was previously remediated in *Blood Simple*, *A Fistful of Dollars*. As the scene fades in, the score starts to come to the fore, and, as the camera tracks into Leo's house, the music becomes recognisable as 'Danny Boy' at the same time as blood-curdling screams also become audible. One of Leo's guards is lying dead, with his still lit cigarette setting fire to a newspaper. A cut shows the intruder letting in his partner who brings two Thompson machine-guns with him, before another cut relocates the action to Leo's room with a shot of a gramophone, the source of the diegetic song. As the assassins climb the stairs, Leo lounges on his bed smoking a cigar, unaware of the commotion below. However, the ascending smoke caused by the fire alerts him to the impending danger, and as 'Danny Boy' continues uninterrupted, Leo arms himself and rolls under the bed before shooting one of the attackers in the ankle and then delivering a headshot when he falls. The crime boss then collects the fallen man's Thompson before crossing to another room and climbing out of the window as flames engulf the house.[162]

[162] Ibid.

Figure 29 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

The pivotal role of fire in this scene, as a framing device, warning, and backdrop, unmistakeably recalls *A Fistful of Dollars*.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Leone's film focuses on two rival families battling for control of a border town, a scenario reminiscent of the gang warfare central to the plots of both *The Glass Key* and *Miller's Crossing*. In Leone's film, The Man With No Name places himself between the two clans, playing each side against the other, mirroring Tom's duplicity when he seemingly goes over to Casper, but also recalling one of the central motifs of *Red Harvest*. In one of his manoeuvres, The Man With No Name attacks a Rojo house hoping to implicate their enemies, the Baxters. However, he is caught and tortured, but managing to escape, sets light to the compound. Under the impression that he is seeking refuge with the Baxters, Ramon Rojo (Johnny Wels) seeks retribution and starts a fire at the other clan's house, killing their men as they flee the burning property. In the frenzy which follows the camera captures the death of a Baxter as he plummets from the first floor of the house.[163]

[163] *A Fistful of Dollars*.

Figure 30 - Screenshot from *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)

The method of this man's demise closely matches Leo's dramatic escape from his own burning home in *Miller's Crossing*. Not only does this serve as another example of the Coen brothers' remediation of other directors, but it also showcases the nature of their filmmaking, as there are always layers of sources remediated into their films.

Of course, *Miller's Crossing* has more in common with the Spaghetti Western than a fleeting allusion. As Mottram puts it, the film 'is as mythical as Leone's films about the West.'[164] *Miller's Crossing* not only shares *A Fistful of Dollars*' indebtedness to Hammett's fiction, but it also recalls its predecessor's air of mythicism, with the mysterious and ethereal disembodied hat imagery equivalent to the mysterious and supernatural presence of The Man With No Name. This means that the allusion to Leone's film during the attack on Leo's home is a clear indication of the Coen brothers' cinematic influences, their awareness of other films inspired by Hammett, and therefore their self-conscious awareness of their own style of remediation.

[164] Mottram, p. 61.

As the scene in *Miller's Crossing* continues following Leo's escape from his blazing house, the second assassin approaches the window, only for Leo to kill him in a shower of bullets. However, as he was poised to shoot, the trigger of his Thompson is inadvertently activated and fires without restraint, not stopping until the gun's magazine has been emptied, in the process seeing the assassin destroy a painting hanging on the wall and shooting his own feet.[165] The gunman's routine has been likened to a dance, becoming known as the Thompson jitterbug. As Steven Levy notes in his essay 'Shot by Shot' (1990), 'Quite simply, the Thompson jitterbug – thus named by its wisecracking creators – refers to a gruesome dance performed involuntarily by a hood who's being riddled with bullets while his dead fingers continue to squeeze the trigger of a Thompson submachine gun.'[166] This 'dance' can be viewed as yet another example of the Coen brothers' black humour, especially as 'Danny Boy' continues uninterrupted and contends with the guns to be heard: 'On one level the Coens see the sequence as a tonic to what they consider a perilous amount of dialogue in the film thus far: "It's about time at this point to shed a little blood," says Ethan. "The movie's in danger of becoming tasteful, you know?"'[167] Yet, as Levy asserts, 'Once [they had] decided to do a gangster movie, it was inevitable that something like the Thompson jitterbug would find its way onscreen. The New York-based brothers [...] are known for infusing their intricately plotted screenplays with uniquely macabre twists.' [168] In a remediative sense, the inclusion of the Thompson jitterbug also sees the Coen brothers transcend their influences, as it is more macabre and violent than anything from Hammett's canon, and would not have been allowed in the heyday of film noir.

The scene and the score continue after the jitterbug, as a car turns into the street and resumes the attack. Remaining unflinching, Leo follows the moving vehicle while constantly firing his Thompson, the violence, and indeed 'Danny Boy', reaching a simultaneous crescendo when the riddled car crashes and bursts into flames. The scene then closes on the song's finale as Leo nonchalantly returns the

[165] *Miller's Crossing*.
[166] Steven Levy, 'Shot by Shot', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 36-40 (p. 36).
[167] Ibid., p. 38.
[168] Ibid., p. 36.

cigar he was smoking in bed to his mouth.[169] Regarding the entire scene, Levy surmises that it

> represents the Coens in *their* element: tour de force filmmaking. The rubout scene is an elaborate, explosive montage. But it also drips with irony, primarily because behind the gangster-movie images – blazing machine guns, body parts jerking from direct hits, a house burning down, and a car cash – we hear a soppy rendition of 'Danny Boy,' ostensibly the song playing on Leo's Victoria.[170]

Indeed, although the violence and humour of this assassination attempt stand out, it is the music which ensures that it becomes one of the film's centrepieces. Concluding his essay, Levy elaborates on this point, noting that

> [Leo's] machine-gun virtuosity helps end the sequence with a flourish. But what really makes the scene is 'Danny Boy.' The Coens recruited Irish tenor Frank Patterson [...] to perform the song. After the scene was edited, Patterson went into the studio with an orchestra and watched the monitor so he could tailor the cadences of the song to the mounting body count. At the end, when Finney, cigar stub in his mouth, sighs in satisfaction as he watches his last assailants die in flames, the music swells in old-world mawkishness; '... and I will sleep in peace ... until you come to ... meeeeee!' – a deliciously droll commentary on the Thompson jitterbug that came before.[171]

The use of extreme violence in this scene is another trademark of a Coen brothers' film. As Doom notes, 'the mental and physical destruction of characters, regardless of tone or genre, [has] increased [and been a constant in their films as their career has evolved] [...] in the unique world of the Coen brothers, violence always finds a way to increase.'[172] Indeed, *Miller's Crossing* highlights how they use 'pervasive and explicit' violence to add their own style into scenes which have been remediated into their films from other sources.[173]

This trait is most evident during the scene which immediately follows the Thompson jitterbug when Tom and Leo fight, an event which results in Tom joining Casper. In *The Glass Key*, Ned and Paul's feud occurs in two parts. Firstly, the two men stand-off in a bar when Ned dismisses Paul's handling of the power struggle

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[169] *Miller's Crossing*.
[170] Levy, p. 38.
[171] Ibid., p. 40.
[172] Doom, p. xi.
[173] Jon Lewis, 'The Coen Brothers', in *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 108-117 (p. 114).

with O'Rory, an encounter which leads the former to punch his boss.[174] Then, following his escape from O'Rory's boys, Ned takes on the role of investigator. Beginning to piece all the parts of the puzzle together he confronts Paul with a few home truths about the woman he loves. Thinking that this is a sign Ned also loves her, Paul angrily ends their association, proclaiming, 'Get out, you heel, this is the kiss-off.'[175] Despite the enmity between the two at these two moments, the only physical violence is the punch delivered by Ned. In *Miller's Crossing*, however, the Coen brothers add a dose of their trademark violence to the equivalent scene, ensuring that Tom and Leo's split is as acrimonious as possible. Following the attempted assassination, Tom is summoned to Leo's office. However, Tom does not sympathise with his boss, but rather proceeds to tell Leo that he warned him against provoking Casper and that he now 'look[s] vulnerable'.[176] Unwilling to accept Tom's calculated analysis of how to proceed, Leo announces his plans to marry Verna. Attempting to point out that she is nothing more than a femme fatale, Tom hypothesises that Verna was responsible for the first murder that began the escalating gang war. However, unable to convince an increasingly tense Leo, he finally admits that he has also been sleeping with her. Following this revelation, there is an air of finality in the two men's parting as Leo stands at his window, whilst Tom, mirroring his exit from the office in the opening scene, stands at the door, pausing to look back at his friend, before adjusting his hat and walking out.[177]

This non-violent, if rather awkward, split would seemingly correspond with 'the kiss-off' of *The Glass Key*. However, as previously noted, the Coen brothers routinely infuse their remediations of other sources with an almost grotesque level of violence. Therefore, the scene does not end after Tom leaves the office. As he walks down the heavily fortified corridor, Leo emerges and delivers a series of punches, before Tom is thrown down the stairs. Maintaining the attack, Leo follows him down, punching him down another flight of steps. Now on the club's ground floor, an unrelenting Leo approaches a bloodied Tom, and yet again strikes him. Adding their trademark humour into this scene of violence, the Coen brothers have

[174] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, pp. 78-82.
[175] Ibid., p. 172.
[176] *Miller's Crossing*.
[177] Ibid.

this final punch deposit Tom into the bosom of a large female patron, who takes offence and knocks down the defeated man with her handbag.[178]

Still not content with the damage he has inflicted on Tom, however, Leo looms over him once more, but this time the bartender steps in and stops him. Leo then informs Tom, and everyone else, that, as in *The Glass Key*, this is 'the kiss-off. If I never see him again it'll be soon enough.'[179] The excessive violence in this scene convinces everyone that Tom is on the permanent 'outs' from Leo, and persuades Casper to reach out to him, but it is just another instance of Tom's Machiavellian plans to eradicate the competition. As Deans points out, 'Tom's scheming (to recap: he shags the girl his mob boss and best mate loves, fesses up [to Leo], [then] gets beaten up [by him] – repeatedly – [before] switching allegiance to a rival boss [...]) was motivated by his love for [both] [...] Verna [and for Leo].'[180] In his summary, which covers both this scene and then links it into the film's wider plot, Deans views Tom and Leo's falling out as a paradoxical form of connection between the two. The Coen brothers have established a bond between the two gangsters through a shared experience of violence.

The excessive, some might say unnecessary, violence of this section of *Miller's Crossing* matches the levels exhibited in the previous 'rubout' scene, linking Tom's pummelling at the hands of Leo with the latter's skirmish with his would-be assassins. These two moments also possess another similarity, however, in their use of music as an ironic counterpoint to the action. As with the 'rubout' scene's use of 'Danny Boy', the music during the 'kiss-off' provides a droll commentary on the action, as during Tom's beating, 'Goodnight Sweetheart' takes over the soundtrack. The sentiment of the romantic song sarcastically inverts the meaning of this decidedly unromantic exchange between the pair, as Leo ejects Tom from his life with the first punch instigating the non-diegetic lyric 'Goodnight sweetheart, till we meet tomorrow. / Goodnight sweetheart, sleep will banish sorrow. / Tears and parting may make us forlorn -'.[181] However, the song 'comes to an abrupt end

[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Deans.
[181] *Miller's Crossing*.

[when it is] punctuated by the protracted scream of a large woman who finds Tom at her feet, punch-drunk after the fight with Leo.'[182]

In *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen brothers are undoubtedly remediating Hammett's *The Glass Key* in their violent 'kiss-off'. However, the signature of this scene, its violent nature, is solely attributable to the Coen brothers themselves. The corresponding passages in *The Glass Key* are infused with an equal level of bitterness between its two characters, but the violent nature of the parting is a product of the Coen brothers' reimagining. This scene perfectly illustrates the remediating nature of their films, as it not only recalls Hammett, but at the same time it is also unmistakably a moment of their own creation, which manages to link Tom's experience of violence with that of Leo's from the previous scene by counterpointing the violent imagery with sentimental music. The scoring of *Miller's Crossing*, however, also demonstrates the introspective nature of their filmmaking.

Across the Coenverse

This introspection will be fully addressed in relation to their two most recent films in the seventh chapter, but at this point it is important to note that the remediation in the films of the Coen brothers is not solely outward, it also focuses inward; through remediations of their own filmography. Indeed, *Miller's Crossing* features connections to some of their other films, both previous and future, suggesting that all of their works coexist in the same creative universe (the Coenverse). In the introduction to his edition of essays examining the use of music by contemporary filmmakers, Arved Ashby summarises the Coen brothers' use of music in their films, noting that they have 'deployed a wide variety of songs in films [such as *Miller's Crossing* which are] rife with cross-purposes, ironies, and multivalent meanings [...] the Coens' have developed their own [humourist] "signature" [...] and within that aesthetic, they use songs both as a kind of intertextual "wink" and as a means [...] of "period and place" authentication.'[183] This 'intertextual wink' which Ashby alludes to is more properly thought of as a form of remediation, as it crosses

[182] Mottram, p. 59.
[183] Arved Ashby, 'Introduction', in *Popular Music and the New Auteur: Visionary Filmmakers After MTV*, ed. by Arved Ashby (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-30 (p. 21).

different media, and its introspective nature is most recognisable in the musicality of *Miller's Crossing* when it is considered in relation to their adaptation of *True Grit*.

Both films are scored by long-time collaborator Burwell and employ a similar method of orchestration in their haunting themes. Deans references the music of *Miller's Crossing* in his article, placing specific focus on the 'elegiac theme'.[184] Throughout the film, Burwell's scoring utilises the other songs featured on the soundtrack, including 'Goodnight Sweetheart', the 'ancient harp tune, "Limerick's Lamentation" or "Lochaber No More"',[185] and most notably 'Danny Boy', to construct an identifiable, recurrent central theme for *Miller's Crossing*. As Mottram points out, Burwell's untraditional approach creates a very significant score, which forms the 'main theme, [which is] used to reiterate [Tom's] role as the hero of the plot.'[186] This theme continually haunts the action as it is heard throughout the film, from the mysterious opening credits, through scenes of violence and scheming, right up until the end credits. The theme becomes an integral piece of storytelling, as present throughout the film as Tom, to the point where it begins to acoustically represent his importance to the film. The same technique of orchestrating a recurring and insistent main theme from the wider soundtrack is also evident in *True Grit*.

The later film features a memorable final scene which sees an older Mattie (Elizabeth Marvel) standing at the grave of Rooster Cogburn. Having spent her life in the shadow of the adventure they had when she was just fourteen, Mattie ponders that 'Time just gets away from us' as she walks away from Cogburn's final resting place. As she retreats, the hymn 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' plays in full, with vocals from Iris DeMent.[187] In this final moment, the hymn carries added significance, as the lyrics of the song present a summary of Mattie's journey in *True Grit*:

> What a fellowship, what a joy divine / Leaning on the everlasting arms; / What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, / Leaning on the everlasting arms.

[184] Deans.
[185] Mottram, p. 58.
[186] Ibid., pp. 57-58.
[187] *True Grit* (2010).

> Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; / Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.
>
> Oh how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, / Leaning on the everlasting arms; / Oh how bright the path grows from day to day, / Leaning on the everlasting arms.
>
> What have I to dread, what have I to fear, / Leaning on the everlasting arms? / I have blessed peace with my lord so near, / Leaning on the everlasting arms.[188]

This, however, has another layer of significance, because just as with the use of 'Danny Boy' in his theme for *Miller's Crossing*, Burwell employs musical phrases from 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' throughout *True Grit* as a central motif. Indeed, commenting on the hymn's importance to the film, Laurence MacDonald notes that 'Burwell wrote an atmospheric background for […] *True Grit* (with a slow version of the hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" woven into the music).'[189] By constructing the film's theme from strands of 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', Burwell ensures that the hymn, though not actually heard in full until the finale, becomes a fundamental part of the story. Just like his theme for *Miller's Crossing*, Burwell's score for *True Grit* is orchestrated from existing musical sources which feature on the film's soundtrack. Therefore, the theme is an ever-present part of the film, haunting the action and continually foreshadowing the ending.

This subtle use of music is an example of the introspective remediation of the Coen brothers' films, with the scoring of *True Grit* recalling the musical structure of the earlier *Miller's Crossing*. However, this introspection is also evident within *Miller's Crossing* itself, despite only being the Coen brothers' third feature. After Tom goes over to Casper, one of his first duties is to kill 'the schmatta' Bernie Bernbaum (John Turturro). However, unwilling to murder Verna's brother (whose death he had ironically urged Leo to sanction at the beginning), Tom lets Bernie flee.[190] Later though, a suspicious Dane 'hijacks' Tom and takes him to the site where he supposedly killed Bernie: 'Well we'll go out to Miller's Crossing, and we'll see who's smart.' In the titular forest clearing, it becomes immediately apparent that this scene also mirrors the mysterious opening, with the camera, looking up

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[188] Ibid.
[189] Laurence E MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film Music: A Comprehensive History* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), p. 528.
[190] *Miller's Crossing*.

into the canopy, slowly tracking along the tree line. The upward angle represents Tom's point-of-view as he is marched towards his own assumed death, as it becomes clear that the dream of the blowing hat which Tom described was in fact a premonition of this scene, suggesting that it was not just a MacGuffin.[191]

Figure 31 – Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Figure 32 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

[191] Ibid.

The camera then pans down to floor level, again matching the opening credits, before the Dane threatens that ‘if we don’t find a stiff out here, we leave a fresh one.’ An uncharacteristically quiet Tom returns his gaze upwards as the camera resumes its familiar track along the sky, before he comes to a stop, crouching at a tree to vomit.[192]

Figure 33 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

The Dane views Tom’s visceral reaction as a confirmation of his guilt. Stating that ‘there’s nothing out here’, he removes Tom’s hat, throwing it away so that it can blow in the wind, creating the disembodied hat of the opening credits and transforming Tom’s dream into reality. As the Dane knocks Tom to the ground, the camera assumes his perspective, looking through the forest from ground level, matching another shot from the credits.[193]

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.

Figure 34 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Figure 35 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Just as the Dane raises his gun to Tom's head though, he is stopped by Tic-Tac who has found an unidentifiable body, dressed in Bernie's clothes. Tom has been saved from death, but at the same time this moment also reveals the complete emptiness of all the hat imagery within *Miller's Crossing*.

In this scene it becomes apparent that the mysterious opening credits were either a flash-forward to these events, or a snippet from Tom's own foreboding dream. Any symbolic significance which was attached to the imagery of the floating hat is literary blown away by the wind. However, this scene carries another form of significance, as it also recalls a moment from *Blood Simple*. In this scene, Tom is heard and seen being sick, his flow of vomit caught on camera. A tasteful way of filming this may not have actually shown the vomit, but the Coen brothers do, in the process remediating their debut, which also features the graphic portrayal of a character being sick.

In *Blood Simple*, Marty decides to break into Ray's house. Abby though fights back, and after dislocating one of Marty's fingers, she swiftly turns and kicks him in the genitals. The force and placement of the kick results in Marty stumbling forward to a tree, where he falls to the ground and vomits directly in front of the camera.[194]

Figure 36 - Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

This moment closely mirrors Tom's bout of nausea in *Miller's Crossing*. Afterwards Marty even has the same distant and unbelieving expression on his face as Tom

[194] *Blood Simple*.

did when he was led through the forest. Of course, as Mottram asserts, 'vomit is a frequent motif in Coen films',[195] and these visually similar moments of visceral imagery illustrate an early tendency towards the introspective remediation which becomes so fundamental to their latest films.

The Coen brothers' films, however, are no longer solely retrospective exercises in remediation or introspection. As time has progressed, they have inspired other filmmakers, meaning that their work is often evoked in much the same manner that they remediate other films. This is illustrated in Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's Twelve* (2004). In the film, upon receiving bad news about a planned heist, Rusty Ryan (Brad Pitt) uses a moment from the Coen brothers' film to highlight how this setback affects the gang's prospects of paying back a debt. Fearing that they may have to beg for mercy, Rusty almost philosophically asks his friends if, 'Anybody remember[s] that scene in *Miller's Crossing* where John Turturro begs for his life?' In response, Reuben Tishkoff (Elliott Gould), whose Yiddish persona also recalls the presentation of Bernie, confirms, 'Sure, "Look into your heart", I cry every time.'[196] Soderbergh openly recalls *Miller's Crossing* in this scene, adding a layer of subtext to the situation the crew now find themselves in, illustrating the impact the Coen brothers have had on contemporary filmmakers. This confirms that as well as routinely remediating other sources in their own films, their films are now themselves being remediated in the work of others, placing them within the Hollywood history which they themselves so often remediate, as well as meaning that they are also the subject of the practice of hypermediation.

This moment from *Ocean's Twelve* is actually directly remediating two key scenes from *Miller's Crossing*. In the first, Tom takes Bernie down to the titular clearing, where he resorts to grovelling. Fearing his impending death, Bernie fills the silence as he is marched deeper into the woods: 'Tommy, you can't do this, you don't bump guys, you're not like [Casper's] animals back there. It's not right Tom, they can't make us do this. It's the wrong situation, they can't make us different people than we are [...] I don't deserve to die [...] Do you think I do?'[197] However, Bernie's reasoning does not have any effect, and Tom continues to lead

[195] Mottram, p. 30.
[196] *Ocean's Twelve*, dir. by Steven Soderbergh (Village Roadshow Pictures, 2004).
[197] *Miller's Crossing*.

him further into the clearing, prompting even more drastic begging. A now sobbing Bernie falls to his knees, pleading 'I'm praying to you! Look in your heart! I'm praying to you! Look in your heart [...] You can't kill me. Look in your heart.'[198] Bernie's persistence works, and Tom fires two shots in the air, telling the reprieved bookmaker to flee.

In the second, pivotal, scene, an unreformed Bernie returns to blackmail Tom, admitting that his pleading was an act. Tom, though, constructs a plan which will benefit Leo and himself, tricking Casper into killing the Dane, before Casper is himself gunned down by Bernie. Realising what Tom is up to, Bernie chooses to trust him and gives him the gun he used on Casper, only for Tom to reveal his true motives: 'Bernie, we can't pin this on the Dane [...] [he is] already dead halfway across town [...] it's got to be you, I mean it was your gun.'[199] The scene then assumes a familiar film noir aesthetic (creating yet more hypermediative through-lines) as a half-lit, half-in-shadow Tom cocks Casper's gun and menacingly advances on Bernie.[200]

Figure 37 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.

Adopting his previous tactic, Bernie drops to his knees, begging ‘Tommy! Look in your heart. Look in your heart.’ However, committed to his plan to help Leo, Tom coolly responds ‘What heart’, shooting Bernie in the head and staging the scene to look like a shootout between the two dead men.[201]

The (Remediative) Power of Goodbye

The bulk of this chapter has focused on the Coen brothers’ own use of remediation in their filmmaking, and this trait is once again demonstrated in the final scene. Following his plot to restore Leo to power, Tom attends Bernie’s burial. As he approaches Leo and Verna, the only mourners, he sarcastically notes ‘Big turnout’, to which Verna bitingly retorts ‘Drop dead’. She immediately marches past him without a second glance, leaving the two men to conclude their business whilst she heads for the car.[202]

Figure 38 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.

Figure 39 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

This final sequence has been likened to the conclusion of *The Third Man*. Indeed, in his analysis, Levine notes that when making *Miller's Crossing*, 'Film influences came into play, particularly [...] *The Third Man*, whose final scene is partially reproduced at the end of [the film].'[203] In the final scene of *The Third Man*, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) attends Harry Lime's (Orson Welles) funeral. Like the scenario which unfolds in the Coen brothers' film involving Tom and Bernie, Holly is the man who killed Harry, who was also one of his closest friends. Harry's 'girl' Anna Schmidt (Alida Valli), whose role would be comparable to Verna's, walks away from the grave at the earliest opportunity without looking at Holly, continuing down the cemetery driveway, and leaving him with Major Calloway (Trevor Howard).[204]

[203] Levine, p. 62.
[204] *The Third Man*, dir. by Carol Reed (London Film Productions, 1949).

Figure 40 - Screenshot from *The Third Man* (1949)

Figure 41 - Screenshot from *The Third Man* (1949)

Figure 42 - Screenshot from *The Third Man* (1949)

As in *Miller's Crossing*, these three appear to be the only mourners present at the ceremony, and just as Verna held Tom accountable in the Coen brothers' film, so too does Anna blame Holly. Both women finish their respective films in stony silence, walking past these men in contempt. The parallels between the final scenes of *The Third Man* and *Miller's Crossing* are obvious and perhaps unsurprising. In their interview with Hinson for *Blood Simple*, the brothers made it apparent that Reed's film was a major influence on their work from the beginning. When asked: 'In preparing *Blood Simple*, did you look at other movies and see them as models?' Joel replied: 'we went [...] to see [some films] before we started shooting in terms of deciding what we wanted the visual style of the movie to be, the lighting and all that. Also, we went to see *The Third Man*.'[205]

In this final scene, the Coen brothers are directly remediating *The Third Man* to imbue their ending with the bitter tone and air of finality which resonates at the close of Reed's film. However, the ending of *Miller's Crossing* also underscores this with an indirect remediation of another source, as they once again invert the outcome of their inspirations. In the conclusion to *The Glass Key*, having solved the murder mystery and seen to it that Paul is once again in control, Ned informs

[205] Hinson, pp. 14-15.

his friend that he is leaving town immediately. Paul tries apologies and familial appeals to convince Ned to stay, but he bluntly replies 'I can't. I've got to go.'[206] Then, in what appears to be a final insult, Ned tells Paul that the woman he loves is leaving with him.'[207] Stunned by this double blow, Paul mumbles a goodbye and leaves, before the book ends with Ned staring 'fixedly at the door.'[208] The Coen brothers, however, end *Miller's Crossing* in a way which directly contrasts with *The Glass Key*.

After Verna leaves, Tom has a final conversation with Leo. Stating that he is glad to see him, Leo announces that he and Verna are getting married, before querying Tom's secrecy, 'why didn't you tell me what you were up to? I thought you had really gone over.'[209] Affirming that it was a matter of protecting him in case the plan failed, Tom and Leo continue their final walk with a discussion about their falling out. Suddenly, with urgency and out of desperation, Leo grabs Tom by the arm, pleading that 'I'd do anything if you'd work for me again [...] I need you. Things can be the way they were, I know it. I just know it. As for you and Verna [...] Dammit Tom, I forgive you.'[210] Throwing the offer of forgiveness back in his face, Tom finishes the conversation by saying 'Goodbye Leo.' Angered and hurt by Tom's rejection, Leo walks away, with the notes of Burwell's theme again becoming audible on the soundtrack. As with *The Glass Key*, Tom decides to leave town after squaring things for his employer and friend. The Coen brothers, however, decide to alter their ending. Tom does not get the girl as Ned does in Hammett's novel: Verna is marrying Leo.

Then, truly cementing the ending as their own, the Coen brothers' film closes with one of its recurring motifs. As Leo retreats from the camera, Tom leans against a tree and watches him leave.[211]

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[206] Hammett, *The Glass Key*, pp. 218-220.
[207] Ibid., p. 220.
[208] Ibid., p. 220.
[209] *Miller's Crossing*.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

Figure 43 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Interestingly, this shot of Leo walking away from Tom again recalls the ending of *The Third Man*, as it ironically mirrors Anna's final exit. Notably though, it also perfectly matches a shot from Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*. When film director John L. Sullivan (Joel McCrea) leaves his team so that he can experience the 'real' America, he walks off down a tree-lined path, echoing Leo's exit in the Coen brothers' film.[212]

[212] *Sullivan's Travels*, dir. by Preston Sturges (Paramount Pictures, 1941).

Figure 44 - Screenshot from *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)

By directly remediating this image at the end of *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen brothers are using remediation of classic Hollywood history to underline for those who identify this visual echo that, just like with Sullivan, this moment sees Leo alone. He is cut off from his confidant just as Sullivan is separated from his team.

Meanwhile, after a moment watching Leo's exit, Tom reaches down and puts his hat on. The camera then cuts back, following his gaze, catching the moment Leo also puts on his hat. Tom slowly drops his head, as though pondering the ground, resulting in the brim of his hat obscuring his face, before the film ends with Tom casting a final look at Leo from under his hat.[213]

[213] *Miller's Crossing*.

Figure 45 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

With this, *Miller's Crossing* comes full circle. The opening scene ended as Tom put on his hat and looked back at Leo, and it ends in the same fashion. A hat has been important throughout the film, from the mysterious opening credits, all the way up to this final moment. The Coen brothers have suggested that there is no hidden meaning behind it, a hat is just a hat, but perhaps there is another interpretation, simply attributable to their own creative agency, as one hat or another has continually loomed over *Miller's Crossing*.

As this chapter has illustrated, *Miller's Crossing* collects together both direct and indirect remediations of several of Hammett's own works. More than this though, it also shows an acute awareness of previous cinematic versions of the author's stories. These have been mixed together to form a film which is not an adaptation of any one thing, but rather a remediative amalgamation which captures Hammett's thematic and stylistic voice and continues his literary tradition. Alongside further carefully selected remediations of other influential films and music, moments, themes and images which are solely attributable to them, the Coen brothers have utilised their remediative style to create a film which is unmistakably their own. More than this though, through these remediations of classic films and genre tropes, *Miller's Crossing* also actively stores and revisits

Hollywood history, recapturing the past and inviting viewers to (re)discover it by following them down the rabbit hole; also meaning that the film is an example of hypermedia. Therefore, whilst the Coen brothers owe a debt to Hammett, as well as to the other filmmakers whose work is remediated into the film, ultimately *Miller's Crossing* is a purely Coen creation, and an essential case study of this style of filmmaking.

Chapter Three - ‘I saw so much, I broke my mind…’: Remediating Chandler and Everything but the Kitchen Sink

The previous two chapters framed the argument for the Coen brothers’ remediative filmmaking around the literature and idea of Hammett, along with other cinematic interpretations of said work. He is, however, only one of the three writers of American Detective fiction who have acted as influences for their films. Their seventh feature, *The Big Lebowski*, is as indebted to the work of Chandler, specifically his pulp fiction featuring the private investigator Philip Marlowe, as *Miller’s Crossing* is to Hammett’s oeuvre. As with their earlier films though, *The Big Lebowski* exemplifies the breadth and complexity of the Coen brothers’ remediative filmmaking. As this chapter will address, alongside Chandler’s works and adaptations of them, the film also remediates the work of Hitchcock. This not only demonstrates his continued influence on the Coen brothers’ canon, but the specific remediation of *North by Northwest* (1959) also informs the increasingly convoluted plot of *The Big Lebowski*. As well as this, the film also features the regular remediation of other filmmakers and media, best illustrated through a detailed analysis of the film’s most elaborate dream sequence. Therefore, alongside an analysis of the use and remediation of Chandler’s literature in *The Big Lebowski*, this chapter will also focus on the film’s remediative captures of Howard Hawks’ adaptation of *The Big Sleep* (1946) and Robert Altman’s version of *The Long Goodbye* (1973). I will also explore the real world and further cinematic influences which helped shape the film and its characters, before detailing the remediation of *North by Northwest* as highlighted above. I will then undertake an in-depth case study of one of the film’s most recognisable scenes, underpinning the argument for a remediative approach to filmmaking through an examination of other critiques of the scene by others including Levine and Rowell. This involves comprehensive discussion of myriad sources, including Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* (1945), Salvador Dali’s work, the Bugs Bunny-starring *What’s Opera, Doc?* (1957), Richard Wagner’s opera *Die Walküre*, as well as the scene’s use of music and its remediation of the filmic work of Busby Berkeley. This finishes by returning to a Chandler frame of reference through the remediation of Edward Dmytryk’s *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), another Chandler adaptation, bringing the argument full circle.

Enter the Dude

Their fifth film, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, saw the Coen brothers secure the biggest production budget of their careers, a reported $25 million which 'ballooned' to $40 million. However, it was a commercial failure, making 'a paltry $3 to $6 million at American theatres', losing Warner Brothers 'a huge amount of money', and unlike *Miller's Crossing* and *Barton Fink*, it was not critically successful either.[214] Following this perceived failure, the Coen brothers intended to retreat to familiar territory. This did not entail pursuing a project with a small budget, as 'the expensive film [*The Hudsucker Proxy*] was the anomaly' in their work which had until that point thrived on lesser budgets.[215] They therefore planned to return to safety by revisiting their hard-boiled roots with *The Big Lebowski*. Written 'before the release of *The Hudsucker Proxy*',[216] *The Big Lebowski* deals with another figure in the hard-boiled trinity of American Detective fiction, Chandler. With a laid-back protagonist whose motivation is seemingly divided between recovering a rug which 'really tied the room together' and bowling,[217] *The Big Lebowski* is perhaps the least hard-boiled of their films which were influenced by this trinity of authors. Therefore, they sought an easy-going lead, deciding 'that Jeff Bridges was the perfect actor' to portray the Dude.[218] However, Bridges was busy, so the Coen brothers chose to wait for the right Dude, and instead decided to film *Fargo*.

As Levine notes, when Bridges became available following the completion of *Fargo*, 'it was time [for the Coen brothers'] to call up the spirit of [another] writer in their triumvirate'.[219] In the same way that *Miller's Crossing* utilised Hammett's influence, *The Big Lebowski* remediates multiple pieces from Chandler's wider body of work. As Levine states:

> it was Chandler's *The Big Sleep* [which the Coen brothers] wanted to parallel, if in a joking way, in their own Big movie. Although they drew some of the plot and the characters [...] from the book, what the brothers really liked was the relative insignificance of the shambling, hopelessly complex plot [...] 'We wanted to do a Chandler kind of story in terms of

[214] Levine, pp. 114-117.
[215] Ibid., p. 119.
[216] Ibid., p. 119.
[217] *The Big Lebowski*, dir. by Joel Coen (PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, 1998).
[218] Levine, p. 119.
[219] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

> how it moves, episodically in terms of the characters, unravelling a mystery,' Joel said.[220]

Published in 1939, *The Big Sleep* was the first Chandler novel to feature Marlowe, a seemingly hapless private detective who stumbles through cases whilst constantly being knocked out, much like the Dude. Summarising how the novel provided inspiration for the Coen brothers, Michael Newman asserts that *The Big Lebowski* 'owes not only its title [to *The Big Sleep*] but also its scenario of a detective working for a man who is concerned for a young, irresponsible, female member of the household [as well as] its [overall] structure of episodic encounters with [colourful] characters.' [221] As this suggests, specific parallels between Chandler's novel and the Coen brothers' film are easily drawn.

The Dude, with his hippie pot-head persona, represents a '90s evolution of the Marlowe character: unwittingly finding himself in the middle of a complicated case but determined to solve it – a hero befitting the storyline of *The Big Lebowski*. Similarly, it is apparent to anyone with knowledge of both works that the 'Big' Lebowski (David Huddleston) is himself a facsimile of *The Big Sleep*'s General Sternwood, with both men confined to wheelchairs. After Lebowski's wife is seemingly abducted, he turns to the Dude to find her, just as Sternwood hires Marlowe to unravel a blackmail plot involving his daughter Carmen. It turns out in both cases that the extortions are connected to the world of pornography, creating another parallel between Chandler's Carmen and Bunny Lebowski (Tara Reid). Meanwhile, Lebowski's daughter Maude Lebowski (Julianne Moore) acts as a counterpart to the elder Sternwood daughter Vivian, as both are jealous of the other female in the story, whilst also acting as a love interest for the respective investigator.

These are by no means the only connections, but they do serve to highlight a pattern. Chandler's influence, specifically from his *The Big Sleep*, is noticeable throughout *The Big Lebowski*, but never solely in the form of mere copying or imitation. Instead, elements from the novel have provided inspiration for the Coen brothers film and have been altered to fit the story of the Dude; and whilst it is

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[220] Ibid., p. 140.
[221] Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 169.

undeniable that Chandler's work was fundamental in the shaping of *The Big Lebowski*, it does not take the form of an uncredited adaptation, but rather stands as a film where *The Big Sleep* is just one of many sources remediated into it. This view is supported by Christopher Raczkowski, who notes that for all the similarities between the two works, there are also differences, the most apparent being a pronounced discrepancy between the protagonists. Most noticeably, the Coen brothers' protagonist does not possess Marlowe's verbal dexterity.[222] This is without doubt a conscious decision taken by the filmmakers, as their scripted dialogue constantly shows that they are capable of writing metaphors which rival Chandler's own.

The difference between the characters' articulacy exists because of remediation, for Chandler's novel is by no means the only source remediated by the Coen brothers. As Mottram points out, whilst the film 'Loosely [echoes] the episodic nature of Chandler's high-minded pulp fiction, *The Big Lebowski* is informed – with its variety of colourful locations and characters – by the writer's method of demonstrating different social [strata] through his juxtaposing of people and places.'[223] What Mottram hints at here is that all of Chandler's works, not just *The Big Sleep*, inform the Coen brothers' film and infuse it with a commentary on social and cultural issues seen in its original context; a form of remediative value. Just as the previous chapter established that *Miller's Crossing* represented a remediation of Hammett's wider canon, *The Big Lebowski* similarly stands as a broader Chandler amalgamation, influenced not just by his own fiction, but also by his cultural standing and other translations of his work. For, just as their earlier film also remediated previous Hammett adaptations as well as his writing itself, *The Big Lebowski* also looks back to previous films of Chandler's work, arguably to an even greater extent than the novels.

In *The Big Lebowski*, Chandler is routinely remediated through recollections of other adaptations of his work, creating layers of remediation, whereby particular moments are filtered through multiple influences in a form of amalgamative

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[222] Christopher Raczkowski, 'Metonymic Hats and Metaphoric Tumbleweeds: Noir Literary Aesthetics in *Miller's Crossing* and *The Big Lebowski*', in *This Year's Work in Lebowski Studies*, ed. by Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 98-123 (p. 115).
[223] Mottram, p. 137.

remediation. This idea is touched on by John Murrin and his collaborators, who, without equating the practice with theories of remediation, stress that despite its obvious 'paralleling' of Chandler's first novel, *The Big Lebowski* also simultaneously 'wanders through the history of [...] Hollywood [...] drawing snippets from [...] the film noirs of the 1940s, particularly *The Big Sleep* (1946).'[224] This quotation appears to advocate that *The Big Lebowski* contains a series of hypermediative through-lines to classic films with these 'wanders through' Hollywood history, but it also makes specific reference to a more fundamental influence. The first cinematic adaptation of *The Big Sleep* is an obvious source of remediation for the Coen brothers' film. Although, according to Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer, whilst '*The Big Lebowski* cheerfully rips off scenes, setups, lines, and characters from [the Hawks] film, the Coens have placed greater emphasis on the links to [the original novel].'[225] However, in reality the Coen brothers are as equally indebted to the Hawks film as they are to the Chandler novel, as both are clearly remediated in *The Big Lebowski*.

Most importantly, 'the relative insignificance of [*The Big Sleep*'s] shambling, hopelessly complex plot' which Levine asserted that the Coen brothers wished to replicate, does not come from the novel. Chandler's novels have plots which can be followed to their conclusion. However, due to the censorship of the Hays Code in Hollywood cinema between 1934 and 1968, which effectively blocked the more risqué plot details and necessitated the inclusion of extra scenes and a subplot involving Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall (Marlowe and Vivian respectively) because of popular demand for the couple, the film noir take on *The Big Sleep* features a convoluted and confusing plot. As Jones notes, Hawks' adaptation 'had such a complicated plot that even its screenwriters, William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett, and Jules Furthman; [the] director; and Chandler himself professed not to quite understand all that was going on.'[226]

The point is not just that *The Big Lebowski* is a remediation of both Chandler's novel and the film of *The Big Sleep*, but that it merely uses these

[224] John M. Murrin et al., Liberty Equality, Power (Sixth Edition): A History of the American People (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), p. 1092.
[225] Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer, *Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities: Gender, Genre, and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 207.
[226] Jones, p. 157.

sources to ground its own story. The Coen brothers are the authors of *The Big Lebowski*, because it never descends into mere imitation; it is a creative practice of remediation. This view accords with David Denby's reading, as he asserts that the film of *The Big Sleep* represents the 'jumping-off point for *The Big Lebowski*', although the Coen brothers' feature does not 'taunt its model; it mutely reveres it, and finds a rhythm of its own.'[227] The Hawks adaptation of *The Big Sleep* provided as much inspiration for the Coen brothers as Chandler's novel did, demonstrating that multiple sources are amalgamated into their own story.

The Big Lebowski also remediates a variety of other Marlowe adaptations. Whilst some plot and structural elements from the film were influenced by Hawks' *The Big Sleep*, there are instances where the Coen brothers are not remediating either the earlier film or Chandler's fiction. The most apparent example of this comes in the shape of the hero of *The Big Lebowski*. Despite being thrust into a world of mystery, the Dude is nothing like either the novel's or Bogart's incarnations of Marlowe. In many ways, the traditional presentation of Marlowe 'provides the foil and reverse inspiration [indirect remediation] for the scruffy, inept, and inarticulate softie [...] known simply as' the Dude.[228] As Denby elaborates, Marlowe 'always anticipates the next moment and has a thirst for action, whereas the Dude is a man so slack that he can't sit in a chair without hitching his leg over one arm, exposing his crotch [...] The Dude, so to speak resists being drawn into a story; he wants to spend his time bowling.'[229] Whilst *The Big Lebowski* presents a Chandleresque story, the Dude does not simply represent the Coen brothers evolution of Chandler's Marlowe or even an approximation of the character portrayed by Bogart.

These versions of Marlowe did not provide the template for the Dude. However, this does not mean that they did not inform the character. Indeed, given the amalgamative nature of remediation present in the Coen brothers' films, it is a certainty that the Dude is, partly, an amalgam of both of these interpretations of Marlowe. The version of the character though which fundamentally shaped the Dude comes from another source. Fourteen years after *The Big Sleep*, Chandler

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[227] David Denby, *Do the Movies Have a Future?* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2012), p. 243.
[228] Kord and Krimmer, p. 207.
[229] Denby, p. 243.

published *The Long Goodbye* (1953), the sixth full-length novel to feature Marlowe. As Mottram observes, 'It is here that connections between *The Big Lebowski* and Chandler run deeper than merely the brothers' raiding of *The Big Sleep*.'[230] *The Long Goodbye* was adapted for Altman's neo-noir film of the same name. One of the Coen brothers' favourites, Joel himself admits that their film 'owes a lot to' the Altman film, which, like *The Big Lebowski*, 'is [...] faithful more to the spirit of the [source] text, rather than [the] literal events [of the novel].'[231]

The Big Lebowski has a closer affinity to the Chandler world depicted in Altman's adaptation of *The Long Goodbye* than it does to any of the author's actual work. It is, however, not just in the tone and feel of the films that this connection is apparent, the Dude himself is a testament to the influence of Altman's film. Exploring the inspiration behind the Coen brothers' film, Levine asserts that they found further inspiration in '*The Long Goodbye*, with Elliott Gould [starring] as a shabby, less-than-sharp private eye with a tendency to make absurd speeches.'[232] This Marlowe is 'out of touch' with the times, driving an old (pre-1970s) car and wearing an outdated suit, 'a guy with a cat instead of a girlfriend, and a buffoon who is the tool of those around him',[233] in the words of Drew Casper, 'a pitiable loser.'[234] In many ways this description could easily be applied to the Dude. The Coen brothers' character is at heart a dope-smoking hippie, a remnant of the anti-Vietnam movement adrift in the Gulf War-era world of the 1990s. Both men are temporal displacements, out of their ideal times, and whilst this Marlowe exists outdated in a post-Vietnam America, the Dude, who was also there, is adrift in the face of a contemporary war. Like Altman's Marlowe, the Dude also wears inappropriate clothes (a dressing gown and pyjamas in public is too relaxed to even be casual), drives, in polite terms, a 'classic' car, and is used by nearly everyone else in the story at some point, be it the Big Lebowski, Maude, the Nihilists, or Jackie Treehorn (Ben Gazzara). Meanwhile, instead of a cat, the Dude's only meaningful relationship is with the intensely damaged Vietnam War veteran Walter

[230] Mottram, p. 138.
[231] Ibid., p. 138.
[232] Levine, p. 140.
[233] D.K. Holm, *Film Soleil: The Pocket Essential Guide* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2005), p. 77.
[234] Drew Casper, Hollywood Film 1963-1976: Years of Revolution and Reaction (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 1900.

Sobchak (John Goodman). Just as *The Big Lebowski* offers a Chandler inspired adventure for the times, in this case the 1990s, Altman's *The Long Goodbye* also contemporises the setting of its hard-boiled story, updating the novel's 1950s period to the 1970s. Interestingly, as detailed above, the Dude is a relic of two decades before *The Big Lebowski* takes place, and similarly Altman's protagonist, referred to by the filmmaker himself as Rip Van Marlowe, is not updated with the setting of the film, he stays 'in the milieu of the 1950s.'[235]

Altman presents a 1970s Chandler adaptation with a 1950s Marlowe, so arguably *The Big Lebowski* continues this trend, depicting a 1990s detective story featuring a 1970s hero. Just as Altman's vision of Marlowe was a presentation of Chandler's protagonist who had been 'asleep for twenty years',[236] it appears that the Dude may in fact be the evolution of the same character after another two decades. This form of characterisation also raises a tangible remediative thread of political and social commentary. Altman's Marlowe is presumably a Vietnam veteran, he is the right age, he is alone and isolated, socially inept and stuck in the past. By choosing to evoke this sense in a 1990s film which also highlights the negative impacts of the Vietnam War, the Coen brothers are using their characterisation of the Dude to remediatively caution America about the mental traumas of veterans from the country's latest foreign entanglement. The argument that the two characters are the same, or at least cut from a similar cloth as each other, is supported by both films' inclusion of an early scene at a supermarket.

The Long Goodbye opens with a snoozing Marlowe being awoken by his hungry cat. Unable to appease even the feline, he journeys to a supermarket in the middle of the night, searching for some 'Coury Brand cat food'. After being mocked by a clerk (who needs a cat when they have a girl?), Marlowe returns home defeated.[237]

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[235] Jay Beck, 'The Democratic Voice: Altman's Sound Aesthetics in the 1970s', in *A Companion to Robert Altman*, ed. by Adrian Danks (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), pp. 184-209 (p. 194).
[236] Jones, p. 158.
[237] *The Long Goodbye*, dir. by Robert Altman (E-K-Corporation, 1973).

Figure 46 - Screenshot from *The Long Goodbye* (1973)

Analysing this opening, William Luhr notes that 'This goofy sequence seems out of place in a [...] detective film, particularly since it has no relationship to subsequent plot events.' [238] However, whilst Luhr is correct about the scene's lack of contribution to the wider plot, he also overlooks its importance in establishing the character of this Marlowe. Dictated to by a cat, not invited to a party at his neighbours', and a joke to the grocery store staff, he is a lonely loser. On top of which, he appears to be a poor sleuth, as he cannot even outwit the animal when he returns home with the wrong brand of food.

The opening of *The Long Goodbye* obviously provided inspiration for the Coen brothers, as the introductory scene of *The Big Lebowski* unfolds in a similar pattern. Following a solitary piece of tumbleweed from the surrounding desert, perhaps symbolising the floaty drifting of the film's central character, the camera ends up in a supermarket. Cue the Dude, deciding which product to choose, albeit cream instead of cat food.[239]

[238] William Luhr, *Film Noir* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 147.
[239] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 47 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

After deciding and paying, the scene cuts to show the protagonist with his cream and trusty bowling ball arriving home, the up-beat soundtrack of the opening finishing as he crosses the threshold and simultaneously enters the plot.[240] Just like Marlowe's quest for cat food in the Altman film, the Dude's shopping trip has no bearing on the wider story. Its only contribution seems to be taking the Dude out of his house, so that when he returns, he can be attacked by the waiting thugs sent by Treehorn and starting the convoluted plot machinations that follow. However, just as the 'goofy' opening sequence of *The Long Goodbye* provided an insight into Marlowe, so too does this corresponding scene serve as an introduction to the characterisation of the Dude. The supermarket excursion establishes everything about him, a laid-back man who clearly does not care what society, or the people in it, thinks about him. This is evidenced by his choice to shop in a bathrobe whilst wearing sunglasses in the middle of the night. He also has no concept of financial issues (he writes a cheque for sixty-nine cents to cover his purchase), values loyalty (which is why he carries a Ralphs card, a type of loyalty programme for this store) and lives in the moment (buying what he needs then and

[240] Ibid.

there). All he wants is a single carton of cream so that he can make himself a White Russian.[241]

This opening supermarket sequence is hilarious and informative, but most importantly, it highlights that the Coen brothers have remediated a variety of Chandler sources, both the author's own work and further adaptations, in *The Big Lebowski*. The characterisation of the Dude, as established in the opening scene, is an unquestionable remediation of Altman's version of Marlowe. However, at the same time it is also obvious that *The Big Lebowski* is weaving together other Chandler threads, be they the Marlowe novels or the adaptations, so that no single source can be identified as the true inspiration behind the film. Instead, *The Big Lebowski* presents an amalgamation, which recalls a variety of sources: a result of the Coen brothers' style of remediation.

The idea that *The Big Lebowski* represents an amalgam of the different guises of Marlowe and his adventures appears to be correct when considered in relation to Jerome Charyn's observations. In *Movieland: Hollywood and the Great American Dream Culture* (1996), Charyn discusses Chandler's legacy in Hollywood, and notes that the author's most iconic character 'is rootless and alone [...] he has the quality of walking amnesia.'[242] This image of Marlowe could quite easily fit the Dude, who is most certainly rootless and conducts himself with an air of cheerful and comfortable detachment, a possible manifestation of the walking amnesiac. To reinforce his view of Marlowe's persona, Charyn then quotes Chandler himself, who described his protagonist as

> a lonely man, a poor man [...] I think he will always have a fairly shabby office, a lonely house, a number of affairs, but no permanent connection. I think he will always be awakened at some inconvenient hour by some inconvenient person to do some inconvenient job [...] I see him always in a lonely street, in lonely rooms, puzzled but never quite defeated.[243]

With a few differences, even Chandler's own views of Marlowe almost perfectly capture the characterisation of the Dude. He is a poor man, with no job and spends his free time bowling. He lives alone in squalid conditions, has no permanent

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[241] Ibid.
[242] Jerome Charyn, *Movieland: Hollywood and the Great American Dream Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 167.
[243] Ibid., p. 168.

connections, except Walter, and the cycle of inconvenience Chandler depicts certainly applies to the Dude's role in the Coen brothers' story.

The Big Lebowski certainly presents a Chandleresque plot and structure, but perhaps the Dude is not just a Marlowe surrogate. As Charyn concludes, there have been 'so many renderings of Marlowe in the movies, so many faces for a single detective, as if no one character could contain him, capture who he is [...] Marlowe has no definitive face.'[244] There is Chandler's Marlowe, but there are also a number of cinematic detectives owing to the vision of individual filmmakers, actors and screenwriters, as well as to the original character at the same time. Paradoxically then, this could mean that the Dude represents the definitive Marlowe. After all, as was established above, the Coen brothers created him by amalgamating a variety of Chandler sources into their own film, creating the ultimate remediative portrait of the previous renderings of the character. At the very least, the character of the Dude, and the film as a whole for that matter, offers a remediative continuation of the Chandler tradition, both conforming to and altering the writer's original works. However, whilst Chandler's presence is felt throughout *The Big Lebowski*, the film is by no means an adaptation, or imitation, of any one work. Instead, it recollects several different Chandler stories and adaptations into the fabric of its own story through a process of amalgamative remediation.

The fact that *The Big Lebowski* is not simply a Chandler imitation is supported by the realisation that for all the similarities and connections between them, the Dude may not even be the Coen brothers' version of Marlowe at all. As Kord and Krimmer note, despite his central role in the plot, the Dude is out-Marlowed, as it were, by the film's narrator. 'A quintessential cowboy type', and a symbol of 'iconic masculinity' in the mould of Marlowe,[245] the Stranger's (Sam Elliot) voiceover provides the framing for *The Big Lebowski*. Marlowe was the voice of Chandler's fiction, his first-person narration telling the story of his adventures. However, because of the Dude's inarticulate and goofy nature, it is the Stranger, albeit in the form of third-person narration, who guides the audience through *The Big Lebowski*. This similarity is identifiable in the earliest moments, as during the narrator's introduction of the Dude, the Stranger's 'words are culled directly from a

[244] Ibid., p. 168.
[245] Kord and Krimmer, p. 207.

story in which Chandler lays down the law of manhood.'[246] The excerpt which Kord and Krimmer chose to highlight is actually from 'The Simple Art of Murder', an essay on the detective story by Chandler, published in his 1950 collection of short stories of the same title. Describing the general model of a central protagonist in any type of crime story, and almost perfectly encapsulating his own creation at the same time, Chandler asserts how

> down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of [honour] - by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in this world and a good enough man for any world.[247]

As Kord and Krimmer highlight though, for the Stranger's introduction, the Coen brothers once again alter (indirectly remediate) the original source, so that 'a man is transformed into a dude.'[248] Taking the essence of Chandler's essay, the filmmakers translate the author's words into dialogue more suited to both their cowboy narrator and to the purposes of their story:

> I only mention it because sometimes there's a man... I won't say a hero, 'cause, what's a hero? But sometimes, there's a man. And I'm talkin' about the Dude here. Sometimes, there's a man, well, he's the man for his time and place. He fits right in there. And that's the Dude, in Los Angeles. And even if he's a lazy man - and the Dude was most certainly that. Quite possibly the laziest in Los Angeles County, which would place him high in the runnin' for laziest worldwide. But sometimes there's a man, sometimes, there's a man.[249]

This introduction, though in keeping with the sentiment of Chandler's formula for a masculine protagonist, takes the idea to the very edges of parody, as it is stressed repeatedly that the Dude is this man, possibly the one Chandler meant.

Importantly though, this introduction never becomes an outright imitation. Instead, it is the earliest example of the film's remediation, as it is in the next part of Chandler's essay that the essence of the Dude is found. As the author posits, a protagonist should be

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[246] Ibid., p. 207.
[247] Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 19.
[248] Kord and Krimmer, p. 207.
[249] *The Big Lebowski*.

> a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job [...] He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man [...] He talks as the man of his age talks – that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.[250]

The Coen brothers manage to condense the core of this excerpt into little more than a line of dialogue, as the Stranger notes of the Dude that, 'he's the man for his time and place. He fits right in there.'[251] It is in the second, and arguably more important, part of Chandler's description of a detective that the essence of his argument has been distilled by the Coen brothers, and altered to their own style, to better suit their story. It is through this process that *The Big Lebowski* transcends accusations of imitation, as Chandler's essay, whilst undoubtedly an inspiration for the Stranger's introduction, remains just one influence which has been remediated.

The Stranger's introduction is unquestionably inspired by Chandler's 'The Simple Art of Murder', however, the essay is written in his own voice and not presented as Marlowe's narration. This strongly suggests that because of his continued influence on them, the Coen brothers have created a pseudo-Chandler figure, who presides over *The Big Lebowski*, omnisciently guiding the film. The Stranger then becomes a Chandler stand in, narrating the story of the Dude, himself the Marlowe surrogate, in this example of layered remediation.

Many Sources Make a Dude

Even though Chandler and Marlowe provide an inescapable influence upon *The Big Lebowski*, shaping both the story and context of the film, Chandler's works are not the only sources being remediated. This is no more evident than when examining the Dude. As highlighted above, the Dude is an evolution of Marlowe, perhaps the ultimate representation of every version of the character, blended together by the Coen brothers in a process of amalgamative remediation. However, Marlowe is by no means the only source which shapes the Dude. Just as there were multiple renditions of Chandler's detective influencing the protagonist, so too is there more than just one character responsible for the final presentation of the Dude.

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[250] Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp. 19-20.
[251] *The Big Lebowski*.

In the BFI's reader on *The Big Lebowski*, Joshua Tyree and Ben Walters argue that the character of the Dude, and indeed the entire film, is shaped by multiple sources, not just the work of Chandler. They note that, 'There are weird shreds of other films embedded in *Lebowski*, like Ivan Passer's nouveau noir *Cutter's Way* (1981), in which a young, svelte, muscular Jeff Bridges plays a beach bum gigolo with an angry and abusive Vietnam vet pal.'[252] Bridges' character in the earlier film, Richard Bone, not only represents another source of influence for the Dude, he is arguably the prototype of the character, who also happens to have been played the same actor. It is also clear in detailing the connection between Bone and the Dude, that Cutter formed the basic inspiration for Walter, the Coen brothers' own interpretation of an angry Vietnam veteran. Detailing the obvious influence Passer's film provided, Ronald Bergen notes that the similarities between the two films resulted in an unnamed critic labelling '*The Big Lebowski* "a remake of *Cutter's Way* strained through *The Big Sleep*, a poison-pen love letter to LA and all the movies made about it, a cowboy's opium dream of life at the end of the trail, and a bowling movie about Desert Storm."'[253] This shows that *The Big Lebowski* takes elements from a multitude of sources and amalgamates them into a Coen brothers' creation. This process subsequently undermines any notion that *The Big Lebowski* could be considered a mere 'remake' of any of its influences; how can it be a remake of one film, filtered through another, and an unspecified number of other works, as well as featuring the disparate ideas of a cowboy's dream, bowling and a foreign war?

To dismiss *The Big Lebowski* as a mere remake of any of its influences is to entirely overlook the process of creative remediation. In his paper on the film, Allan Smithee refers to the Coen brothers' method of collecting different sources together. In a discussion regarding the film's characters, he notes that

> Besides providing the Coens with an occasion for the collecting of culture, *Lebowski* also provides them with an excuse to bring together some of their [favourite] actors, and here again the activity of collecting and its resonances with past association cannot be meaningfully separated from the creative process [...] although Walter Sobchak had his beginnings as a kind of composite of the Coens' friend Pete Exline,

[252] Joshua M. Tyree and Ben Walters, *The Big Lebowski* (London: The British Film Institute, 2007), p. 47.
[253] Bergen, p. 69.

> his buddy Walter and director John Milius […] the character was ultimately inspired by the outsized persona of John Goodman. Though 'The Dude' was not initially written for Jeff Bridges, it soon became obvious that the role was the perfect showcase for the kind of dazed conspiratorial [victimisation] that Bridges had embodied in 1970s thrillers like *Winter Kills* and *Cutter's Way*.[254]

Smithee's argument explains the genesis of Walter as a composite of several sources, including Goodman himself, and without ever delving into an equivalent level of detail he also reaches the same conclusion about the Dude. The character is unique, but also exists as an amalgamation, collecting together the influence of multiple sources. The Dude, in one way or another, represents several iterations of Marlowe, as well as the Coen brothers' own interpretation of the detective. Yet, at the same time, the Dude shares a similarity with Bone from *Cutter's Way*, and apparently also with Bridges' character Nick Kegan, from William Richert's 1979 political thriller *Winter Kills*. The Dude is a seemingly composite representation of the highlights of Bridges' career, just as Walter borrows from Goodman's. However, it is not just his many roles which influence the Dude, arguably it is the man himself. Bridges suffered from a drug problem and his laid-back nature is well known. In short, Bridges, the man, is the Dude, which is why *The Big Lebowski* was put on hold until he was available.

The Dude, and indeed *The Big Lebowski* as a whole, stands as an example of complex remediation. Whilst merging all the disparate elements detailed above into one character, the Coen brothers also manage to ensure that their creation fits in their own story (where else could the Dude belong?) and is in no way a mere imitation. Part of the Dude is down to Bridges himself, but Marlowe is also there, and just for good measure, the Coen brothers also partly based the Dude on a figure they supposedly knew of in the real world. Just as Walter had been 'an amalgam' of various sources, including 'at least two [real world] originals', so too was there a factual inspiration for the Dude.[255] According to Levine, he was modelled on 'an independent film producer's rep called Jeff Dowd, also nicknamed "the Dude." Like [the Coen brothers'] fictional creation, the real Jeff had once been a member of an activist group called the Seattle Seven. He liked to call himself "the

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[254] Allan Smithee, 'What Condition the Postmodern Condition Is In: Collecting Culture in *The Big Lebowski*', in *This Year's Work in Lebowski Studies*, ed. by Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 255-275 (p. 261).
[255] Levine, p. 140.

Pope of dope"; the brothers' Dude would also enjoy indulging in the weed.'[256] The character of the Dude has been shaped by an actual person, as well as the sources listed above: he is a creation of the Coen brothers. There may be similarities between the Dude and a multitude of different characters and figures, but he is not merely an imitation of any one or group of them: the Dude is an original product of creative remediation.

This amalgamation of sources can also be seen in certain plot points. Regarding Walter, Levine cites that the real inspiration for the character

> was the brothers' Uncle Peter, a bitter Vietnam veteran. Peter told the boys of having his rug stolen, saying that it had 'tied the room together,' [...] although somehow in the creative process the rug became the Dude's. Uncle Peter also told them about a friend, another vet, whose car was taken by a kid who left his homework in it; this too found its way into the complicated plot of the film.[257]

As this highlights, several of the film's minor plotlines were inspired by events which happened in the lives of some of the influences for the key characters. Yet, the rug incident, which happened to the real Walter, is the fundamental occurrence which drives the Dude's adventure. This is the perfect illustration of the remediative nature of *The Big Lebowski*, where sources of influence are altered and amalgamated into a growing pool of inspirations to create a new film. This demonstrates that *The Big Lebowski* is not a mere imitation and how the Coen brothers take the inspiration which they have gained from other sources and use it in their own work; simultaneously guaranteeing that they are the only ones who can claim legitimate authorship of their own films.

Sometimes There's a Hitch

Of course, because of its utilisation of remediation, *The Big Lebowski* can be open to criticism regarding its originality. In a 1998 interview with the siblings, Gary Susman remarked, 'Sure, if you ask about the inspiration behind *The Big Lebowski*, Ethan will explain, "the narrative is suggested by Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels. It's this episodic narrative about a character who's not a private eye in this case, just a lay-about pothead who works his way through L.A. society

[256] Ibid., p. 140.
[257] Ibid., p. 140.

trying to unravel this mystery."'[258] However, it is undoubtedly a Coen brothers' film, arguably their most seminal work, and that is partly due to its remediation of a wide variety of references and genres. It is not just a reworking of Chandler, but rather an amalgamation of various sources. Elaborating on the film's myriad influences, Mottram states that it is, 'A cross-generic hybrid, *The Big Lebowski* is as liberal with its appropriation of different film styles as *Raising Arizona*. Part-Western, part Busby Berkeley musical, part Philip Marlowe homage, the film is as diverse as the inhabitants of its central location, Los Angeles.'[259] Whilst he is open to the scope of the film's remediation though, Mottram overlooks that as much as it is a Marlowe-inspired adventure, the film arguably owes as much to the works of Hitchcock.

Just as *Blood Simple* remediated two Hitchcock films, *Torn Curtain* and *Psycho*, so too does *The Big Lebowski*. From its earliest moments, it is impossible to ignore the striking similarities which exist between *The Big Lebowski* and Hitchcock's ultimate tale of mistaken identity, *North by Northwest*. Following the opening Altman-inspired shopping trip in *The Big Lebowski*, the Dude returns home, only to be roughed up by two thugs working for Treehorn. Leading the Dude into the bathroom, Blond Treehorn Thug (Mark Pellegrino) repeatedly dunks the Dude's head in the toilet, demanding payment of money owed to their boss. Asking three times, 'Where's the money, Lebowski?', the thug finally explains that, 'Your wife owes money to Jackie Treehorn, that means you owe money to Jackie Treehorn.' The other thug (Philip Moon) then unbuckles his trousers and urinates on the Dude's rug. It is at this point that the case of mistaken identity crystallises, as the Dude tells the intruders, 'Nobody calls me Lebowski. You got the wrong guy. I'm the Dude, man.' Despite their reluctance, the penny finally drops, and Treehorn's thugs realise they have the wrong Lebowski, a 'fucking loser'.[260]

This case of mistaken identity drives the film's entire plot, as the Dude then embarks on a quest to obtain a replacement for his soiled rug. Importantly though, the mix-up between the Dude and Lebowski also clearly illustrates the Coen

[258] Gary Susman, 'Making It Clear: The Coen Brothers', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 84-86 (p.84).
[259] Mottram, p. 132.
[260] *The Big Lebowski*.

brothers' intentions to '[cannibalise] from Hitchcock.'[261] Indeed, as Erica Rowell asserts, 'The initial case of mistaken identity [in *The Big Lebowski*] borrows from the situation that thrusts *North by Northwest*'s ad man [...] into a world of intrigue.'[262] Within the opening ten minutes of the Hitchcock film, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is mistaken for the mysterious George Kaplan and is escorted by two 'mere errand boys' to their employer's house. When Lester Townsend, really Phillip Vandamm (James Mason), greets Thornhill, he admits that he did not expect Kaplan to look like this, commenting that 'My secretary is a great admirer of your methods, Mr. Kaplan.' It is at this moment that Thornhill finally understands the case of mistaken identity, interrupting to ask 'Did you call me "Kaplan"? […] My name is Thornhill. Roger Thornhill. It's never been anything else.' However, despite his protestations, his captors do not believe his assertions and maintain that he is Kaplan. Refusing to let Thornhill leave, Vandamm's lackeys get him drunk so that no-one will believe his story.[263]

The comparisons between these earliest moments are easily drawn. Just as Thornhill is mistaken for Kaplan in *North by Northwest*, so too is the Dude wrongly identified as Lebowski. Remediatively speaking, this imbues the Coen brothers' film with a rich hypermediative lineage, connecting it to many other examples of 'mistaken identity' from Hollywood history. However, it also means that the film (re)captures the espionage and mistrust of Hitchcock's work, just as *Blood Simple* did with his *Torn Curtain*, creating a rather ironic commentary on the now ended Cold War by framing this remediation as comedy. Despite the obvious inspiration which *North by Northwest* provided, however, the respective scenarios differ in outcome in one specific manner. Whilst Vandamm and his men blatantly refuse to believe that Thornhill is not Kaplan, after the Dude's repeated denials in *The Big Lebowski*, not to mention the sub-standard quality of his residence, Treehorn's thugs eventually accept that this is not the Lebowski they are looking for. This change in outcome may seem inconsequential, but it completely alters the direction of the entire film. The continuation of the mistaken identity in *North by Northwest* drives the plot of the film, as Thornhill becomes entwined with Kaplan

[261] Erica Rowell, *The Brothers Grim: The Films of Ethan and Joel Coen* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 238.
[262] Ibid., p. 238.
[263] *North by Northwest*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959).

and entangled in the world of espionage. However, because Treehorn's thugs accept that they have tracked the wrong man in *The Big Lebowski*, the Dude seeks out the real Lebowski, finding himself fulfilling the role of a private investigator. Ensuring that, despite the opening similarity to the Hitchcock film, this story more closely resembles the framework of Chandler's fiction. Not only does this example highlight the remediation employed in *The Big Lebowski*, but it also clearly demonstrates the Coen brothers' originality. Whilst *North by Northwest* unequivocally shaped part of *The Big Lebowski*, the scenario is altered in a way which is beneficial to their story.

The influence of *North by Northwest* is not just present in this early instance though, it is apparent throughout *The Big Lebowski*. As the Dude's 'investigation' gathers pace, Treehorn's thugs return to bring him to their boss, who 'wants to see the deadbeat Lebowski.' Presented as a watered-down James Bond villain, Treehorn mixes the Dude a White Russian and the two men enter a conversation regarding the 'smut business'. Getting down to the crux of the matter, Bunny and the debt owed to him, Treehorn is interrupted by a telephone call. Here, the Dude's detective skills kick in, as he notices that his host is writing something down on a pad of paper, which must be significant as the camera zooms in on it. When Treehorn conveniently excuses himself, taking the note with him, the Dude hurries over to the notepad. Using a pencil to reveal the impression of Treehorn's memo onto a new sheet, the Dude unearths nothing more than a lewd doodle.[264]

[264] *The Big Lebowski*.

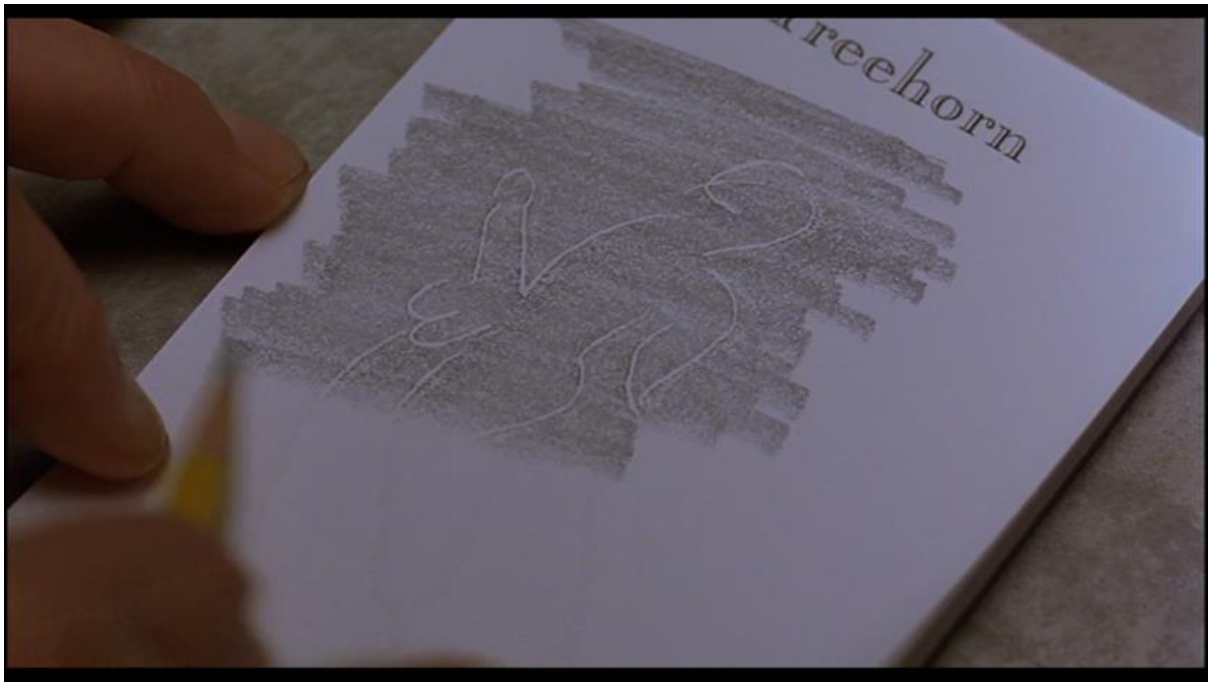

Figure 48 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This is not connected with the phone call, so this elaborate piece of detective work has had no bearing on the plot. Still, this moment is so comically absurd that it fits in completely with the film's overall tone, whilst its pornographic connotations and inconsequentiality recall *The Big Sleep*. However, the method by which the Dude unveils Treehorn's doodle itself demonstrates the further remediation of *North by Northwest*.

As Thornhill becomes increasingly entrenched in the world of Kaplan in the Hitchcock film, he becomes involved with Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), unaware that she is also an undercover spy entangled with Vandamm. When she receives a phone call regarding a meeting, she writes a quick note and hides it, and proceeds to warn him off, at which point Thornhill becomes suspicious. Eventually manipulating the situation so that he is left in the hotel room on his own, he goes to the telephone, using a pencil to find out what exactly she wrote on the pad. Unlike in *The Big Lebowski*, where the Dude merely uncovers a rude drawing, in *North by Northwest*, Thornhill discovers the address of Eve's secret meeting.[265]

[265] *North by Northwest*.

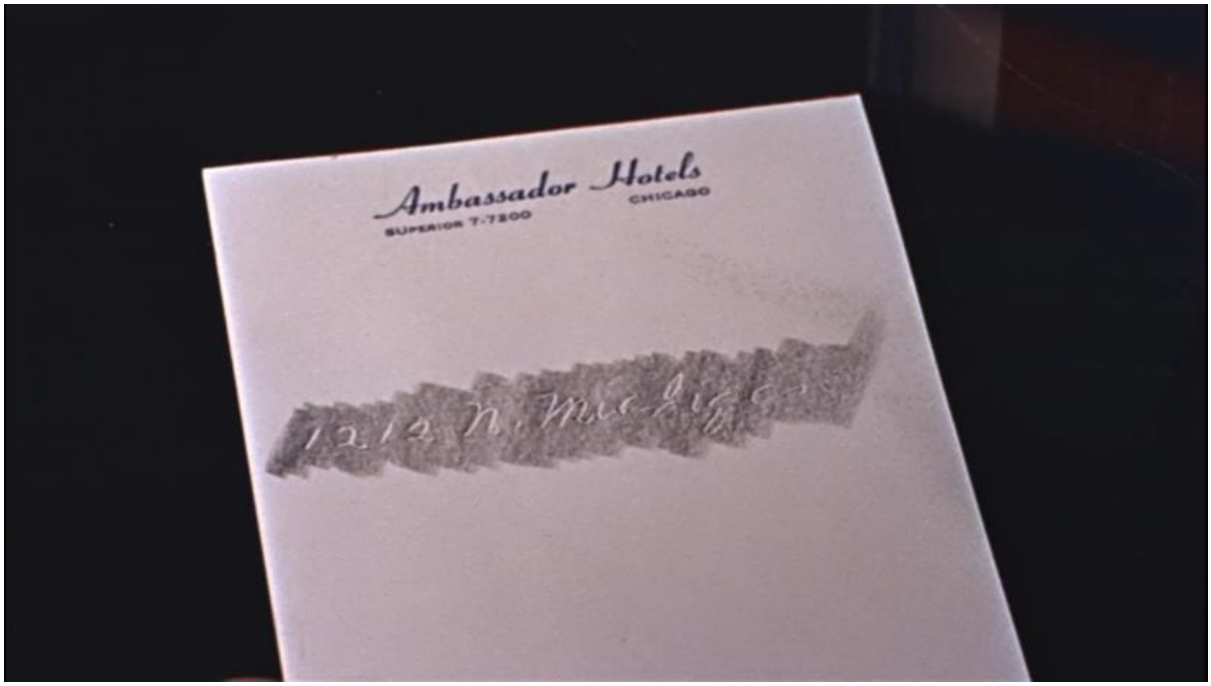

Figure 49 - Screenshot from *North by Northwest* (1959)

It is by following Eve to this address that Thornhill finds out who Vandamm really is, and finally becomes fully involved with the espionage associated with the identity of Kaplan. Regarding the similarity between Thornhill's uncovering of the address and the Dude's skilled, yet fruitless, detective work, Rowell notes that

> The scene [in *The Big* Lebowski] at Treehorn's spoofs the [scene in *North by Northwest*], which deals with spies, lies, and an innocent man unjustly accused (like The Dude). The Dude's attempts to learn about Treehorn by lightly rubbing his pad of paper to see what he wrote is the same tactic which Grant's character employs to discover information about a spy. The Dude is less successful. His pencil rubbing reveals that Treehorn had drawn a naked, aroused man.[266]

In this summary, Rowell is claiming that *The Big Lebowski* is merely spoofing *North by Northwest* during the scene in question, but a spoof refers to a hoax or form of parody 'typically of a film or a genre.'[267] The term parody is linked with practices of imitation, and whilst the scene in *The Big Lebowski* certainly recalls the corresponding scene in *North by Northwest*, it does not descend into spoof; it is an example of creative remediation.

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[266] Rowell, p. 238.
[267] Oxford English Dictionary, 'spoof', in *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary 11th Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

In her analysis, Rowell also raises the salient point which identifies the full extent of the remediation of this moment. She notes how, in his efforts to discover Treehorn's plans, the Dude is not as successful as Hitchcock's protagonist. Thornhill's actions directly affect the plot of *North by Northwest*, the address he discovers leads to his full involvement with the Kaplan identity and moves the film forward. However, the opposite is true in relation to *The Big Lebowski*, as the Dude's detective work and Treehorn's erotic doodle have no effect on the wider film. Perhaps then, the purpose of this remediation is again layered, as it highlights that, despite his similarities to him, the Dude is in no way a skilled investigator like Marlowe, or for that matter Thornhill. Also, whilst Thornhill's incisive work sees him socially elevated into espionage and a new life, the Dude's does not. Indeed, the only purpose of this scene in *The Big Lebowski* is to allow Treehorn to drug the Dude. The inconsequential nature of this episode highlights that whilst the Dude's methods recall the similar moment in *North by Northwest*, it is by no means just imitating the Hitchcock film. Instead, it demonstrates the Coen brothers' filmmaking style, and ensures the remediative originality of *The Big Lebowski*.

The third, but by no means final, striking similarity between the two films comes in the form of an architectural likeness. During the climax of *North by Northwest*, Thornhill discovers Vandamm's house atop Mount Rushmore.[268]

[268] *North by Northwest*.

Figure 50 - Screenshot from *North by Northwest* (1959)

The building and its surroundings play a central role in the final moments, as Thornhill thwarts Vandamm's escape, and he and Eve narrowly avoid plummeting to their deaths from the landmark. According to Steven Jacobs, Hitchcock played down the architectural significance of Vandamm's lair, referring to it as a 'scale model of a house by Frank Lloyd Wright.'[269] Jacobs, however, takes a more unequivocal view, labelling the house as a 'unmistakably Wrightian building.'[270] Indeed, Robert Boyle, Hitchcock's long-time production designer who oversaw the building's creation, 'acknowledged the importance of Wright for the design of the Vandamm house', specifically his work on the Fallingwater house, made from 'horizontal striated stone' and similar in many ways to the one in the film.[271] Jacobs notes in summary that the 'Vandamm house turned out to be a masterpiece of cinematic architecture [...] a cinematic exaggeration of Wright's [designs].'[272]

The similarity between Vandamm's house and Treehorn's mansion is easily seen and explicable. Although the exterior of Treehorn's house is not seen in *The*

[269] Steven Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007), p. 309.
[270] Ibid., p. 309.
[271] Ibid., pp. 309-310.
[272] Ibid., p. 311.

Big Lebowski, the interior of it certainly mirrors that of the Vandamm house, and the expansive layout suggests that the building itself would be a close approximation of the Wright inspired residence in *North by Northwest*.[273]

Figure 51 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This implied similarity is understandable, because, according to Jacobs, aside from Wright, one of the most important American architects of the twentieth century was John Lautner. Listing some Lautner designs featured on screen, he namechecks Richard Donner's *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989), as well as *The Big Lebowski*.[274] The Treehorn compound was one of Lautner's architectural projects, and its similarity to the Wright-inspired Vandamm house is to be expected, as Lautner studied under Wright in the 1930s.[275] The Treehorn house recalls Vandamm's because Lautner's design was unquestionably influenced by Wright, just as the Coen brothers were influenced by Hitchcock. The use of Lautner in *The Big Lebowski* directly recalls Hitchcock and his use of a Wrightian piece of design in *North by Northwest*. However, because this frame of reference involves multiple, inter-connected layers of remediation, it also helps defend the Coen brothers' claims of authorship. Whilst

[273] *The Big Lebowski*.
[274] Jacobs, p. 311.
[275] Ibid., p. 311.

Lautner followed Wright's method of design, it could not be said that he merely imitated his mentor. As Jacobs points out, Lautner became one of the most important American architects in his own right. Using the same reasoning then, it is logical to argue that whilst the Coen brothers have undoubtedly been influenced by others, they do not resort to simple imitation. Instead, they should be identified as remediative filmmakers.

Treehorn's compound, although similar in design to the house in *North by Northwest*, does not play as central a role in *The Big Lebowski* as the one in Hitchcock's film does. As discussed, the Vandamm house and the surrounding area become crucial elements of the film's climax, but this is not replicated in *The Big Lebowski*. Following the Dude's visit to Treehorn, the compound of the porn mogul is not seen again, as the investigation moves away from Treehorn and onto a completely different tack. This is the only time Treehorn's house appears on screen, a complete contrast to the importance assumed by the Vandamm house during the final act of the Hitchcock film. This shows that the Coen brothers are willing to twist the sources they remediate to suit their stories. Here, the visually similar house appears during the middle of the film rather than at the climax, and instead of playing a crucial role in the developing plot, it is almost inconsequential to the overall story, functioning almost exclusively as another remediative rabbit hole to go down. The Coen brothers remediate and alter influential sources to benefit their own filmmaking process.

I Saw So Much, I Broke My Mind

Treehorn's house is not crucial to the plot, however, it is the initial setting for one of the film's most recognisable scenes. During his meeting with the pornographer, the Dude is drugged, leading to the film's second, and most unusual, dream sequence. This scene is an excellent example of the Coen brothers' amalgamative, layering remediation, as it begins at Treehorn's compound, remediating *North by Northwest*, but the resulting dream sequence also recalls another Hitchcock film, *Spellbound*. This dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski* does share a general aesthetic, and indeed psychoanalytic, kinship with the scene from the earlier film. The dream scenes in *Spellbound* last a 'mere two and a half minutes', yet make

the film ‘unforgettable’,[276] and this sentiment is equally applicable to the longer lasting fantasy in *The Big Lebowski*.

The dream sequence in *Spellbound* was designed by the leading Surrealist artist Salvador Dali, whom Hitchcock had in turn been influenced by, and as such they had a strong visual kinship.[277] Indeed, as Sharon Packer observes, the dreamscape created for *Spellbound* ‘recollects Dali’s painting *Melancholy*’ and its surreal quality.[278] Dali’s *Uranium and Atomica Melancholia Idyll*, to give it its full name, was actually completed in the same year as the Hitchcock film, and arose from the artist’s ‘desire to [...] [appeal] to the subconscious, to memory, to the irrational content of dreams’,[279] a description which also fits *Spellbound*.

Figure 52 - Image of Salvador Dali’s *Uranium and Atomica Melancholia Idyll* (1945)

[276] Sharon Packer, *Movies and the Modern Psyche* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), p. 47.
[277] David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 168.
[278] Packer, p. 47.
[279] Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, ‘*Uranium and Atomica Melancholia Idyll*: Salvador Dali’, *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia*, 2015, http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/atomica-melancolica-melancholic-atomic [date accessed: 30th September 2015].

This description could just as easily be applied to the dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski*, as it manifests the Dude's desires, fears and experiences from the entire film. Indeed, the Coen brothers may not directly recall Dali's *Melancholy*, but their dream sequence is strange enough to be compared to *Spellbound*, and therefore the painting itself indirectly, especially considering that they told production designer Rick Heinrichs that *The Big Lebowski* should have 'a bright, glowing, surreal look.'[280] Furthermore, the Surrealist look was evidently on their minds, as by the time of *The Big Lebowski*'s release, they had completed the screenplay for *To the White Sea*. Dated the 13th of August 1998, page 14 of the script describes the aesthetics for the aerial 'reveal' of Tokyo. After the plane where the action is set is rocked by anti-aircraft fire, it is stated that the camera will 'enter a bank of clouds and emerge to see a surrealistic scene of a city sky dotted with huge tethered balloons.' [281] Even when planning a World War Two film, the Surrealist tradition associated with the dream scene in *The Big Lebowski*, still played on the Coen brothers' minds.

Despite the clear similarities between the Surrealist depictions of dreamscapes in the films though, it is not until the closing moments of the Dude's fantasy that the Dali and Hitchcock collaboration is directly remediated. At its end, the Dude's dream descends into a nightmare, becoming a psychoanalytic exploration of his fears. This occurs when, adopting the role of a bowling ball, the Dude hurtles down a lane towards a set of pins. As he reaches them, with a gape of fear replacing his previous look of ecstasy, the sound of a strike combines with the crescendo of the dream's psychedelic musical accompaniment as the pins disperse into blackness. From this darkness, ominous chords intrude on the soundtrack, and a naked bouncing girl is replaced by three Nihilists, who enter the Dude's dream from the film itself, as they earlier broke into his house to confront him about Bunny. Wearing Red latex costumes, itself a nod to the German band Kraftwerk, and snipping giant scissors, they chase the Dude in an exploitation of his fear over their earlier threat to 'cut off the Dude's pleasure for their own benefit.'[282] With this chase, the Dude literally runs back into reality, thus ending his

[280] Levine, p. 147.
[281] Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, 'To the White Sea – Screenplay by Joel Coen & Ethan Coen", Film Script, August 13th 1998, p. 14.
[282] Rowell, p. 226.

fantasy.[283] Summarising this sequence, Rowell offers a reading where she notes its recollections of earlier moments in *The Big Lebowski* and the link to *Spellbound*:

> When he collides with the pins, the music changes to a darker, avant-garde instrumental, and a nightmare overtakes the sex fantasy [...] a red-suited nihilist chases the Dude snipping huge scissors. Morphing castration threats [...] the nightmare grafts art with cinema. The giant scissors are wall art in Maude's studio, as well as a flash homage to [...] Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, which [also] features a gigantic set of scissors in a dream sequence.[284]

Indeed, the process by which the Dude is hounded by the scissor-wielding Nihilists adds to the Surrealist quality of the dream sequence, but it also remediates the Dali designed section from *Spellbound*.

In the Hitchcock film, Dr Constance Petersen (Ingrid Bergman) and her mentor Dr Alexander Brulov (Michael Checkhov) attempt to analyse the dream of an amnesiac murder suspect, John Ballantyne (Gregory Peck). During Ballantyne's recollection, the camera enters his head and quickly fades into the surreal dreamscape. Looking for the 'hidden meaning', Ballantyne describes an apparent 'gambling house' without any walls, 'just a lot of curtains with eyes painted on them.' Nightmarish as this image is, with large disembodied eyes staring back at the camera, the dream sequence then becomes more unsettling as an unidentified man, 'walking around with a large pair of scissors', begins slicing through the eyes, before the dream then morphs into a living Surrealist painting.[285]

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[283] *The Big Lebowski*.
[284] Rowell, pp. 224-226.
[285] *Spellbound*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Selznick International Pictures, 1945).

Figure 53 - Screenshot from *Spellbound* (1945)

This dream sequence perfectly captures the Surrealism of Dali's aesthetics, and was certainly an influence on *The Big Lebowski*. Yet, only one section is directly remediated into the corresponding scene in the Coen brothers' film. Tellingly though, this solitary moment speaks to their remediative style, as it exemplifies the amalgamation of layered influences. Regarding the dream sequence from *Spellbound*, David James notes that 'the backdrop is painted with huge eyes that are sliced apart by a pair of correspondingly large scissors – a reworking of the cut-eye motif that had been [immortalised in] *Un Chien Andalou*.'[286] This similarity is partly down to Dali, the creator of Hitchcock's dream sequence, who also co-wrote and essentially co-directed Luis Bunuel's 1929 film. This link adds a secondary inspiration to the conclusion of the Dude's dream. Undoubtedly the Coen brothers were influenced by Hitchcock, but the remediation of *Spellbound* in turn recalls *Un Chien Andalou*. Therefore, if *Spellbound* provides the inspiration for the giant scissors which threaten to castrate the Dude, it is telling that the Hitchcock film may also be remediating an earlier source with its use of the visual, suggesting that forms of remediation in film have existed for a long time, and that the Coen brothers are simply following their cinematic idols by also employing it.

[286] James, p. 168.

The Coen brothers are highly cineliterate, so they would have been aware of the connection between the dream sequence in *Spellbound* and *Un Chien Andalou*. Their choice to reference the Hitchcock film may therefore also have been made to recall both, combining two sources of inspiration in one moment. If this is the case, it also supports the Coen brothers' standing as the principal authors of their films. *Spellbound* may indeed recall *Un Chien Andalou*, but it remains a film by Hitchcock, not an imitation of Bunuel. By extension then, despite being partly influenced by *Spellbound*, the Coen brothers' dream sequence reinforces their own originality.

Indeed, when considering the full extent of remediation in the dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski*, it is helpful to recall the words of T.S. Eliot. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), Eliot notes that, in approaching a text, the normal tendency is to

> praise [the author], upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles [anyone] else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, [what is the writer's essence]. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach the poet [or indeed any artist] without this prejudice [of originality] we shall find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.[287]

In other words, to search purely for absolute originality in a work is to sometimes overlook its most creative passages. So, whilst the scissor-wielding Nihilists from *The Big Lebowski* recall *Spellbound*, and also *Un Chien Andalou*, this moment (indeed all of the Dude's fantasy and the film as a whole) stands as a distinctively Coen brothers creation, the originality of which paradoxically stems from its remediation of external sources.

Aside from a shared aesthetic style and a direct remediation of the scene itself though, the Coen brothers' dream sequence has a much more fundamental association with *Spellbound*, in its psychological basis. Hitchcock's film is about the practice of psychoanalysis, and the dream sequence is a direct visual

[287] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 152-156 (p. 156).

manifestation of the character's unconscious desires and fears. This statement is equally true of the dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski*, which deals with the psyche of the Dude. The scene, at least to begin with, is an eclectic representation of his innermost desires; including his erotic attraction to Maude, his almost fetishist equation of sex and bowling, his ironically heroic view of himself and his fear of both literal and metaphorical castration. Although initially comic rather than nightmarish, the Coen brothers' dream sequence is as psychologically acute as the one from *Spellbound*. Indeed, it is worth remembering that this dream initially takes the form of a quasi-pornographic film named *Gutterballs*, and that, in his fantasy, the Dude is the hero. Meanwhile, the tool belt and work overalls he wears throughout the dream directly equates him with the television repairman played by Karl Hungus (Peter Stormare) in one of Treehorn's pornographic films which the Dude had been shown earlier. In this way, in his dream, the Dude is emphasising and exploring his own virility.

This is asserted further through his conquering of the dream representation of Maude, who is dressed like a Valkyrie, kitted out in armour and wielding a pointedly phallic trident. However, the Dude's virility and self-imposed heroic status is then ironically undercut by the appearance of the Nihilists, who attempt to castrate him. Here, the Coen brothers are portraying the Freudian theory that men's dreams often reflect castration anxiety. In this respect, the dream sequence in *The Big Lebowski* is a knowing representation of Freudian dream symbolism, which is strongly influenced by Hitchcock and Dali who use similar imagery.

At the same time though, the Coen brothers are not just displaying the contents of their protagonist's mind, they are also letting the audience into their own creative minds by revealing the myriad influences which are amalgamated in this sequence. This is apparent even before the scene properly begins, as Treehorn drugs the Dude. When he passes out, landing face-first on the camera lens, he lies there as the Stranger's voiceover describes in almost florid detail what is happening. The backlighting is eliminated from the shot as the Dude remains on the camera, becoming a silhouette, filtered through an effect which mimics the ripples of floating on top of water, as filmed from below the surface.[288]

[288] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 54 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This technique, which makes it appear that the Dude is lying face down in a pool, almost certainly recalls the famous opening of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Wilder's film opens with Joe Gillis (William Holden) floating upside down and dead in Norma Desmond's (Gloria Swanson) pool.[289] Gillis then proceeds to narrate the film from beyond the grave, explaining how he ended up there in the first place.

Given that *The Big Lebowski* is narrated by the Stranger, this nod to the unconventional narration of *Sunset Boulevard* raises a striking possibility. Mystery surrounds the presence and nature of the Coen brothers' narrator, so by visually linking his voiceover to the scene in Wilder's film which establishes that Gillis is telling the story from beyond the grave, they are subtly implying that the Stranger is also dead, or just a figment of the Dude's doped out imagination. Attempting to explain the Stranger's necessity to *The Big Lebowski*, Levine notes how the idea for the character arose from the Coen brothers' 'fondness for narration, and their wanting to catch something of Chandler's novelistic voice, [so they] decided to

[289] *Sunset Boulevard*, dir. by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1950).

frame the story with a voiceover […] so they created a character who stood outside the plot and gave it a kind of fairy-tale quality.'[290]

Though Levine's explanation cites Chandler's fiction, the visual link between the Coen brothers' film and *Sunset Boulevard* suggests a richer remediative meaning. The Stranger operates 'outside the plot', giving the film a 'fairy-tale quality', but his standing as a fictional, even supernatural, creation strongly suggests that he is the Dude's, and by extension the Coen brothers', imaginative approximation of a dead man. This is an assumption affirmed given the characterisation of the narrator, for, as Levine continues, when conceiving the Stranger:

> so sure were [the Coen brothers] of the sort of comforting, authoritative western twang they wanted for the character that in the script they invoked the name of Sam Elliott, an actor who [specialised] in westerns. As to why the narrator should be a cowboy the brothers couldn't say, it was just one of their instinctive creative impulses at work, without any explicit symbolism behind it that they were aware of or particularly cared to think about. Perhaps it had something to do with the early frontier mentality of the west and the setting of California.[291]

Levine goes to great length to determine that the Stranger is a cowboy. In the process, however, he also appears to unwittingly support the argument that the narrator may already be dead when *The Big Lebowski* is told. Undeniably, the cowboys' best days are behind them (both literally and as a filmic genre), and whilst not extinct, they have most certainly gone out of fashion. Added to this is the evocation of the frontier mentality, an important period in American history most closely associated with the nineteenth century.

These facts act alongside the Stranger's somewhat antiquated mannerisms (ordering Sarsaparilla in a bowling alley), his appearance in full cowboy garb, his speech, and even his disapproval of the Dude's more colourful language, 'Do you have to use so many cuss words', to suggest that he is a ghost of the past. Together with the remediation of *Sunset Boulevard*, it seems perfectly justifiable to claim that the Stranger is acting as the film's narrator from beyond the grave. This gives *The Big Lebowski* another layer of remediation and hypermediative connections to Hollywood's past, as the dead narrator became one of the uncanny

[290] Levine, pp. 141-142.
[291] Ibid., p. 142.

cornerstones of film noir,[292] itself inspired by pulp fiction, both of which undeniably provided sources of inspiration for the Coen brothers.

Connecting the narration of *The Big Lebowski* with the film's pulp influences, Levine compares the Stranger's voiceover to Chandler's own first-person narrative style. This similarity is most apparent during the Stranger's introduction to the dream sequence. When the Dude passes out, voiceover takes over as the Stranger describes how, 'Darkness washed over the Dude, darker than a black steer's tookus on a moonless prairie night. There was no bottom.'[293] Not only do these words match the lighting and shade of the corresponding shot, the voiceover also cues the beginning of the Dude's dream in a way equivalent to Chandler's own style. As Rowell asserts, in this scene, 'Treehorn catapults the Dude into dreamland by way of a spiked white Russian. The screen goes black, and the Stranger introduces the Dude's tumble into sleep through a send-up of Chandleresque prose.'[294]

Rowell draws the comparison between the Stranger's dialogue and Chandler's writing in *The Big Sleep*. Described by Jason Bailey as 'pithy',[295] the hard-boiled dialogue of American Detective fiction was developed by Chandler for Marlowe's first appearance. During his first interaction with the Sternwood family, Marlowe describes General Sternwood: 'A few locks of dry white hair clung to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock.'[296] As Rowell points out, there is a shared style and pattern, despite the disparate subject matter, between Chandler's prose and the Stranger's narration. Notably though, considering that the Stranger supposedly generates a Chandler-inspired narrative tone, in the second Marlowe adventure, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), when the protagonist is knocked out, the story does not resume until he wakes.

Twice, Marlowe finds himself unconscious, and both times there is no hint of a dream.[297] There is no third-person storytelling in a Marlowe novel, so when the

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[292] Joan Copjec, 'The Phenomenal Nonphenomenal: Private Space in Film Noir', in *Shades of Noir: A Reader*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 167-198 (p. 183).
[293] *The Big Lebowski*.
[294] Rowell, p. 223.
[295] Jason Bailey, Pulp Fiction: The Complete Story of Quentin Tarantino's Masterpiece (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2013), p. 41.
[296] Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 7.
[297] Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), pp. 63-65, 161-164.

private investigator is not conscious there can be no story. So, whilst the Stranger may appear to be the Coen brothers' embodiment of Chandler's 'novelistic voice', his existence as an extra-diegetic narrator underscores the true extent of the film's remediation. In this case, they once again demonstrate their willingness to alter their inspirations to better suit their own purposes. The character of the Stranger may speak in 'Chandleresque prose', allowing comparisons to be drawn between the film's dialogue and Chandler's fiction, but at the same time *The Big Lebowski* is also fundamentally removed from the author's narrative form. The Stranger fulfils the role of an omniscient narrator, a complete contrast to the subjective first-person storytelling employed by Chandler, so, whilst it can be argued that the Stranger was partly inspired by Chandler's stories, it is also unquestionable that the character is a creative amalgam: a product of remediation, as is the whole film.

The use of both Chandler's fiction and the mythos of the Western genre during the Stranger's creation is also evident in his introduction to the dream. The dialogue used is a mixture of Western idioms presented in a 'Chandleresque' fashion and serves as an example of the inspiration which the Coen brothers take from American Popular culture. Cowboys and Chandler both have an undeniable place in the country's heritage and in the hearts of the populace. Essentially, they fall under the criteria of icons of Americana. The term Americana is defined by *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as referring to 'materials concerning or characteristic of America, its [civilisation], or its culture [...] things typical of America.'[298] This broad classification fits all the key parts of American culture which have inspired the Coen brothers throughout their career. However, the same source goes on to specifically associate Americana with 'a genre of American music.'[299] Monte Dutton notes that as a 'musical genre [Americana] is maddeningly difficult to encompass.'[300] Speaking to Dutton, Slaid Cleaves, an Americana musician, traces the genre's roots back to icons of American music history such as Buddy Holly and Hank Williams, noting how their influences are a major part of the Americana sound. He goes on to clarify that many traits can be associated with the term, be it

[298] Merriam-Webster Online, 'Americana', *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/americana [date accessed: 7th October 2015].
[299] Ibid.
[300] Monte Dutton, *True to the Roots: Americana Music Revealed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. 40.

through a ‘folk-country background’, ‘rock acts with a more [...] country style of [song writing]’, or ‘alternative, outside-the-norm’ acts with a ‘rock background.’[301]

All these criteria apply to Kenny Rogers. A cross-generational and ‘genre hopping’ artist, Rogers’ band, The First Edition, covered a Mickey Newbury song in 1968. ‘Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)’ was concerned with the experience of using drugs, and became synonymous with a psychedelic frame of reference.[302] The fact that the ‘lyrics [...] play to both drug and sexual experiences,’[303] meant that the Coen brothers knew before filming that ‘Just Dropped In’ would be the perfect accompaniment to the dream sequence.[304] The song not only manages to capture the Dude’s condition at this juncture, but the dream sequence itself also has a psychedelic feel on top of its Surrealist aesthetic.

In a wider sense though, the choice to match the dream sequence to this piece of music adds yet another layer of remediation. The musical genre of Americana is centred on key influences: one generation of Americana is reliant on, and an evolution of, the last and so on. Therefore, it obviously speaks to the Coen brothers, whose filmmaking is also built around inspiration taken from others. The music in the dream sequence as an example of Americana itself suggests remediation, as it is concerned with earlier influences and American culture. This adds to the complexities of the scene, which is itself an amalgam of multiple sources, meaning that this musical remediation is acting on an already rich mixture. Americana though is not regarded as a genre of imitation, by extension then, *The Big Lebowski*, and all of the Coen brothers’ films, should not be considered this way either. Even though it takes inspiration from outside sources, including Americana, it combines them into something of relative originality.

The Coen brothers’ remediation of Americana is also evident through the visual presentation of the Dude’s dream. As Rowell notes in her analysis, the sequence is representative of ‘the Dude’s circumstances and recent encounters – he’s in Hollywood, has just chatted with a porn king, and has the sexy Maude on

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[301] Ibid., pp. 37-40.
[302] Gregory McIntosh, ‘Kenny Rogers’, in *All Music Guide to Country: The Definitive Guide to Country Music*, ed. by Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra and Stephen Thomas Erlewine (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), pp. 655-659 (p. 656).
[303] Rowell, p. 223.
[304] Levine, p. 149.

his mind – his subconscious creates his own porno flick.'[305] Indeed, as the Dude descends the stairs towards his fantasy bowling lane, he lays eyes on Valkyrie Maude in her golden suit of armour standing with a veritable harem of women plumed with headdresses of bowling pins. Some commentators ignore this almost completely, for instance, Levine glosses over Maude's attire, simply stating that she is dressed as a 'Viking' before moving on.[306] However, despite the initially incongruous nature of Maude's appearance, another outside source is clearly influencing this moment.

Rowell describes how, in his fantasy, the Dude meets a representation of Maude, 'dressed as a Valkyrie of the lanes. Her breastplate is made of bowling balls, and her horned helmet and trident are *objets d'art* from Lebowski's manse.'[307] This attire links dream Maude to a figure from Norse mythology. This is important because Rowell's evocation of the Valkyrie also invariably recalls the character of Brünnhilde from Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*. Yet, despite the seeming incongruity between this, the sequence's other strange imagery and the decidedly un-Wagnerian music of Kenny Rogers, this reference is by no means merely frivolous.

As stated above, in his dream, the Dude sees himself as a hero, the one who can tame Maude. It makes sense then, that in *Gutterballs*, Maude, who in the film itself directly challenges the Dude's masculinity, should take on the form of Brünnhilde, the most fearsome and rebellious of the Valkyrie. Yet, to nullify her threat and reassert his masculinity, the Dude casts himself as Siegfried, the hero of *Die Walküre*. At the opera's climax, Siegfried crosses the magic ring of fire placed around the sleeping Brünnhilde; a ring which only a great hero worthy of, and capable of taming, the Valkyrie can cross. The union of the two is then forged. The Coen brothers, however, present this moment using the imagery of Americana, so the Wagnerian parallels here have often gone unnoticed. The magic fire has become a Berkeley-inspired ring of chorus girls and Siegfried's trusted sword has been replaced with the bowling ball the Dude holds aloft in triumph.

Most notably though, as Tyree and Walters comment, 'Maude's look seems closer to the pastiche Wagner-world of Chuck Jones's *What's Opera, Doc?* […]

[305] Rowell, p. 223.
[306] Levine, p. 144.
[307] Rowell, p. 223.

than [to any] legit production.'[308] The *Looney Tunes'* short, which riffs on *Die Walküre*, envisions Elmer Fudd as Siegfried and Bugs Bunny as Brünnhilde, and begins with Elmer's parodic rendition of the famous 'Ride of the Valkyries' from the opera's third act. This lampooning has been so ingrained in popular culture, and grounded in the Americana movement, that even a serious publication on opera, *Getting Opera: A Guide for the Cultured but Confused* (2000), deems it appropriate to clarify the situation. Matt Dobkin stresses that Wagner's composition is 'sometimes known as "Kill the Wabbit",' in deference to Elmer's version.[309] For many viewers of *The Big Lebowski*, and indeed the culturally under-privileged figure of the Dude, the armoured Maude does not evoke Wagner's opera, but rather recalls an indelible cultural reference. As Lee Steels puts it, who does not 'remember Elmer Fudd serenading Bugs/Brünnhilde?'[310]

Thus, it is from the cartoon's imagery, and not that of the opera, that the Coen brothers take inspiration. The depiction of Maude as 'a Valkyrie of the lanes' is arguably a more direct remediation of the two cartoon characters than of Wagner's opera itself. Maude's attire is defined by her golden breastplate:[311]

[308] Tyree and Walters, p. 21.
[309] Matt Dobkin, *Getting Opera: A Guide for the Cultured But Confused* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), p. 245.
[310] Lee Steels, *Magic Apples: Reflections to Mull* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2014), p. 202.
[311] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 55 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This appears to be an amalgam drawn from both the traditional armour worn by Elmer, as Siegfried, and the feminine form adopted by Bugs in the guise of Brünnhilde.[312]

Figure 56 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

[312] *What's Opera, Doc?*, dir. by Chuck Jones (Warner Brothers, 1957).

Figure 57 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

This also means that Maude's headgear and trident are the Coen brothers' remediation of Bugs' (as Elmer puts it) spear and magic helmet.

Therefore, dream Maude is an amalgam of characters and sources, a product of creative remediation. In this moment, the dream sequence simultaneously recalls *Looney Tunes* and, by extension, forms of Americana. Yet, Maude's depiction also remediates Wagner's opera, the original subject of the cartoon parody, which viewers may only grasp if they understand the first reference to Bugs and company. The remediation of sources here is layered, one influence recalls another, and importantly, its inclusion does not impact upon, or limit, audience comprehension of, or engagement with, the resulting film. As Judith Still and Michael Worton note in their 'Introduction' to *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (1990), intertextual theory posits that a text is not a self-contained entity, but is rather 'shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind.' Furthermore:

> a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material […] by all the texts which the reader brings to it. A delicate allusion to a work unknown to the reader, which therefore goes unnoticed, will have a dormant existence in that reading. On the

> other hand, the reader's experience of some practice or theory unknown to the author may lead to a fresh interpretation [of a passage].[313]

Still and Worton's explanation of the theory forms the basis through which to understand the Coen brothers' remediative filmmaking. Their own work mixes together moments from other sources to create relatively original films: remediations. Yet, at the same time, filmmaking of this type is not absolutely predicated on a prior knowledge of said sources; unnoticed latent allusions do not affect the wider understanding of the film but may enrich and deepen it in many ways if they are.

Interestingly, *Gutterballs* routinely recalls the animated short. Just as it could be argued that *Spellbound* and the Surrealist art movement acted as the primary, direct remediation for the unconscious fantasy, it can also be legitimately asserted that the cartoon's parodic version of Wagner is the primary source behind the look of the dream production. The initial segment of the dream sequence, before it descends into a castration anxiety nightmare, quickly features a moment which recalls the animation, as following the opening credits of his fantasy, the Dude enters his dreamscape in a high-walled passageway. As he proceeds into the shadowy realm of the dream, the light generated behind him creates an unnaturally large silhouette, which precedes his entrance. As he dances past the wall obscuring his actual figure, the silhouette grows, creating a large second impression of the Dude as a shadow self.[314]

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[313] Judith Still and Michael Worton, 'Introduction', in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 1-44 (pp. 1-2).
[314] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 58 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This can be compared to the opening moments of the animation, which begins with a hulking silhouette manipulating the weather and unleashing thunder and lightning. However, a downward pan reveals that the monstrous figure is no colossus, only Elmer as Siegfried.[315]

[315] *What's Opera, Doc?*.

Figure 59 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

Figure 60 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

Therefore, the Dude's entrance into the dream sequence is a direct remediation of the cartoon, which then suggests that *Gutterballs* is the Coen brothers' own version of a *Looney Tunes* short. After all, it has the same approximate duration as one of the animations and does not impact on the film's plot in any meaningful way.

Allusions to *What's Opera, Doc?* are continually present throughout the dream sequence though, and after collecting his golden bowling shoes, another nod to the animation's armour, from Saddam Hussein of all people, the Dude goes down to the bowling lane. To get there, he must dance his way down a dizzying staircase.[316]

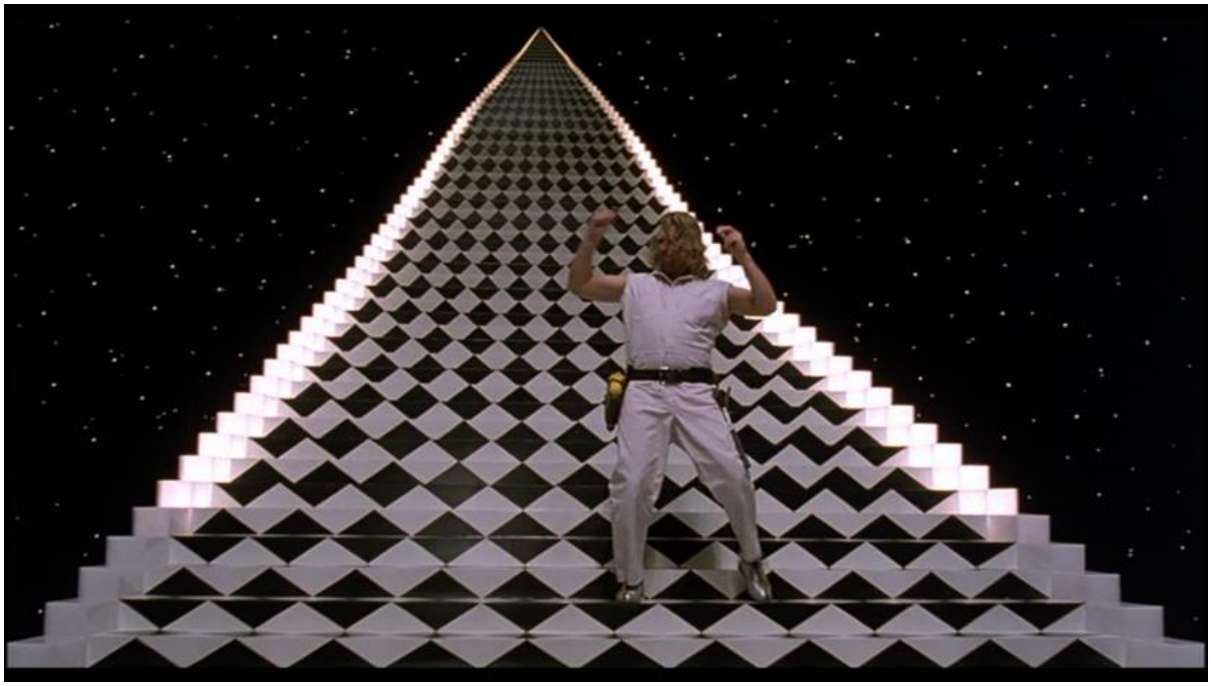

Figure 61 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

The Dude's descent is highly stylised, but the movement of his dancing unmistakeably recalls the animation, which sees Elmer skip balletically up and down a variety of stairways in pursuit of 'the Wabbit'.[317]

[316] *The Big Lebowski*.
[317] *What's Opera, Doc?*.

Figure 62 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

Continuing to support the argument that this cartoon take on Wagner influenced the Coen brothers' presentation of the dream sequence, the recollection of the staircase dance leads into another comparison between the two. After the Dude sees the Valkyrie-like presence of Maude, the two come together and engage in a sensual, and completely bizarre, dance, where he guides her in the art of bowling.[318]

[318] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 63 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This erotic display is a fine example of the Coen brothers' implementation of remediation, as the additional element of bowling imagery makes it entirely in keeping with the film's wider plot, whilst it also recalls the original source, where Bugs is led in a romantic ballet by the besotted Elmer.[319]

[319] *What's Opera, Doc?*.

Figure 64 - Screenshot from *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957)

Admittedly, in the animation there is not a bowling ball in sight. However, given the clear recollections of the cartoon throughout the dream sequence, it seems obvious that the Dude's tango with Maude is inspired by Bugs and Elmer.

Whilst this dance is the last explicit reference to *What's Opera, Doc?*, its inspiration is still present at the fantasy's nightmarish conclusion. As discussed above, the Dude enters a darker dreamscape after he strikes the bowling pins, terror replacing his blissful dancing as he is chased with giant scissors.[320] His dream is denied a happy ending when Maude vanishes from the fantasy. Strikingly, this descent into nightmare is comparable to the final 'act' of the animation. For after Elmer discovers Bugs' ruse when Brünnhilde's helmet and hair fall off, the relaxed strains of music which accompanied the pair's frolicking is replaced by a more ominous orchestration, as Siegfried calls on the winds, 'typhoons, hurricanes, earthquakes,' and even smog, to 'kill the Wabbit'. He succeeds in his quest, but is filled with remorse, asking 'What have I done? I've killed the Wabbit.' As he sobs and carries the lifeless figure away, Bugs sits up (he was only acting) bringing the

[320] The Big Lebowski.

curtain down on the production by asking, 'Well, what did ya expect in an opera, a happy ending?'[321]

The change in musical tone and dark subject matter, the death of Bugs Bunny, during the closing moments of the animation is exactly the same as the shift presented in the ending to *Gutterballs*. 'Just Dropped In' is replaced by a menacing instrumental, whilst Maude and the chorus line are replaced by the Nihilists as the bowling-based porno gives way to a castration nightmare: well, what did you expect in a Coen brothers dream sequence, a happy ending? This is similar enough to identify the influence of the cartoon, and at the same time removed enough to confirm originality. This is the nature of the Coen brothers' filmmaking, the sources they remediate are never hidden in obscurity, yet they are also never blatantly imitated. Instead they are altered to fit their own stories, ensuring that theirs is a filmmaking which demonstrates the possibilities of remediation in the study of film authorship.

In this reading then, the dream sequence is an elaborate reinterpretation of *What's Opera, Doc?*, which is itself a *Looney Tunes* version of a Wagner production. However, it can also be argued that the dream sequence was inspired by the Dali fantasy from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. If there are two competing sources acting as the basis for the Dude's dream, which one acted as the primary remediation? This question becomes even more difficult to address when a third source is added into the dream sequence's cocktail of remediation.

Ethan himself has noted that the elaborate production of the dream primarily served as 'a cheap, gimmicky, obvious way to depict the character's inner life,'[322] and it just so happens that the sequence was also imagined 'as Busby Berkeley musical numbers.'[323] Indeed, in his analysis, Levine almost completely ignores Maude's likeness to the Valkyrie, but this is due to his decision to focus on the fact that the 'dream [is] in the style of a [...] Berkeley musical.'[324] During their discussion of the dream scene's significance, Tyree and Walters stress that the fantasy is a recreation of the Dude's experiences, and therefore the Coen brothers' own

[321] What's Opera, Doc?.
[322] Jones, p. 185.
[323] Levine, p. 142.
[324] Ibid., p. 144.

inspirations. They specifically note that: 'The appearance of co-ordinated chorines [chorus girls] suggests the Dude has seen at least a couple of Busby Berkeley movies.'[325] Strangely though, Jeff Smith believes that, whilst the Dude's 'drug-addled hallucination [successfully manages to] combine bowling with [everything from] Busby Berkeley, [through to] Wagnerian opera, and [even] Kenny Rogers and the First Edition,' *The Big Lebowski* 'exudes less ambition than other Coen films.'[326] However, this argument is undermined, because, as Levine stresses, the dream sequence was 'One of the bigger [if not the biggest] challenges of the film.'[327]

Exploring the importance of the recollections of his classic Hollywood films, Levine adds that, 'Berkeley's musical numbers are now considered to be kitsch by most, [but] the brothers professed to view him as a hero.'[328] Indeed, just as with all of the sources which they remediate, these recollections are included out of admiration, not mere imitation. Whilst the dream sequence undoubtedly remediates Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, opera, the *Looney Tunes*, general Americana, and potentially a myriad of other unidentified sources, Berkeley's standing as one of their cinematic heroes explains much of the aesthetic and choreography of the fantasy. The Coen brothers admired Berkeley's 'innovative camera movements, [and his ability to create] dances that could only exist on film,' whilst they were also attracted by 'the fact that Berkeley felt no need to connect the dance numbers to the film's story.'[329] However, for all the inspiration Berkeley's dance scenes clearly gave the Coen brothers, a fact almost unanimously agreed upon by critics, there is one major difference.

The fantasy scene from *The Big Lebowski* is not entirely disconnected from the rest of the film. Instead, elements of it recall incidents and locales already featured in the film; like the presence of an Iraqi dictator, the preoccupation with bowling and even the inclusion of objects and scenery such as the 'black-and-white chequered floor [as seen in the Big Lebowski's mansion]' and Maude's 'helmet and

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[325] Tyree and Walters, p. 21.
[326] Jeff Smith, 'O Brother, Where Chart Thou?: Pop Music and the Coen Brothers', in *Popular Music and the New Auteur: Visionary Filmmakers After MTV*, ed. by Arved Ashby (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 129-156 (p. 140).
[327] Levine, p. 149.
[328] Ibid., p. 149.
[329] Ibid., p. 149.

trident'.[330] Rather than simply recreating a Berkeley musical interlude though, the Coen brothers have created a dream sequence which perfectly encapsulates the practice of remediation. Instead of following Berkeley's template for disconnected dance numbers, the Coen brothers have completely changed the dynamic, fully incorporating their dream sequence with the rest of the film and altering the source of their inspiration to better suit their own story and themes. Therefore, the Dude's fantasy does not stand as a mere Berkeley imitation, it is in fact a remediative interpretation; the dream sequence, and the entire film, is an amalgamation of different remediations which add up to a Coen brothers film.

Some elements from *The Big Lebowski* are solely attributable to the influence of Berkeley. Jones points out that Berkeley's 'signatures were a kaleidoscopic crane (overhead) shot of dancers in a pattern and a through-the-legs tracking shot,'[331] both of which feature in the dream sequence. An elevated camera angle is employed when Maude and the dancers are first revealed. whist a crane is then used to recreate Berkeley's trademark with a directly overhead shot, which captures the dancing girls encircling the Valkyrie. Meanwhile, the Dude, along with the camera, finds himself going through the legs of the chorus girls as he hurtles down the lane towards the pins.[332]

[330] Rowell, p. 223.
[331] Jones, p. 127.
[332] *The Big Lebowski*.

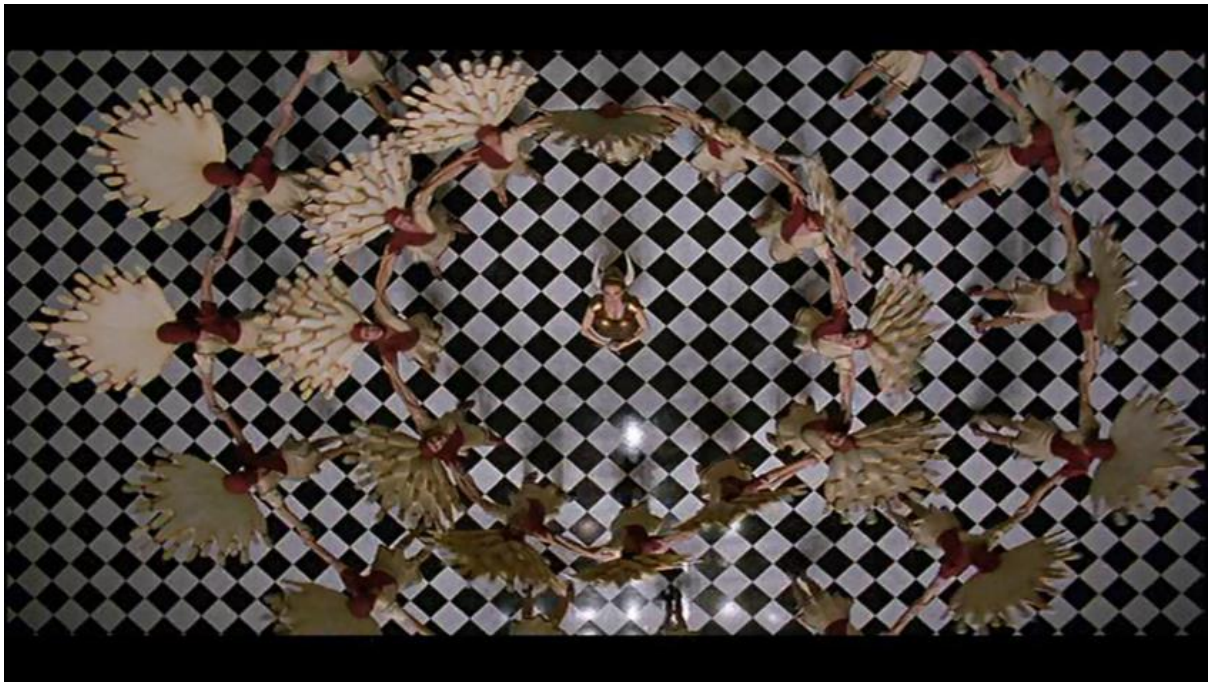

Figure 65 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

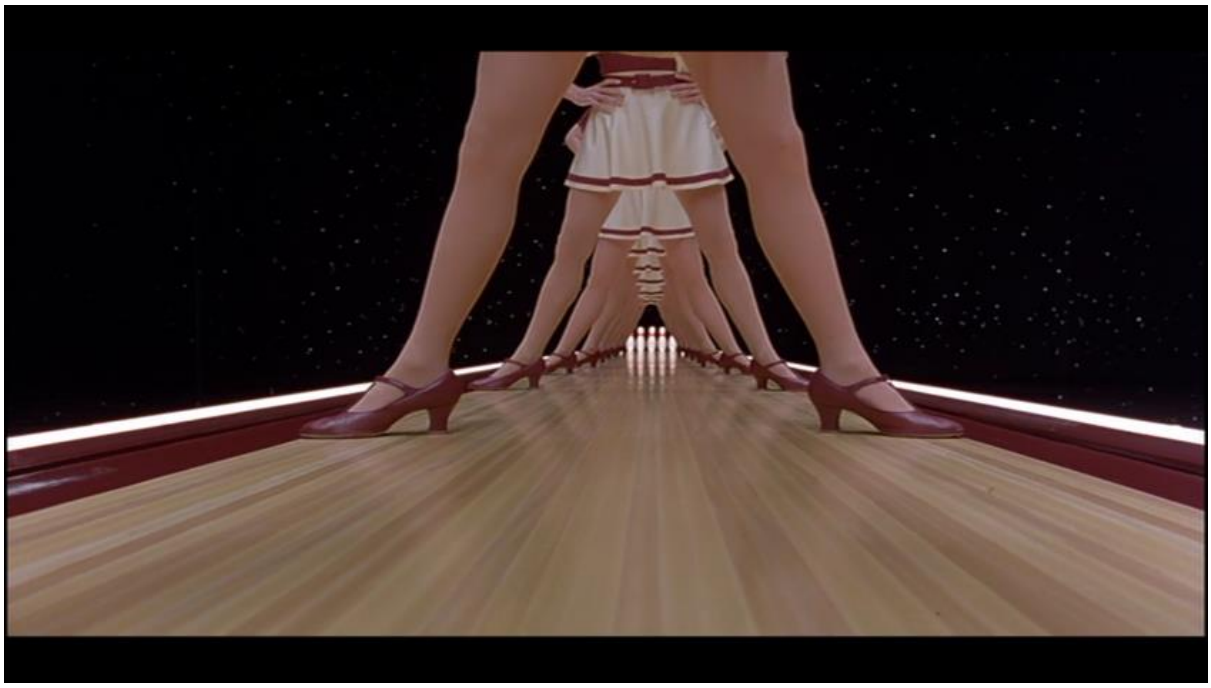

Figure 66 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

Rowell, who attaches a 'slyly symbolic' sexual meaning to these shots, asserts that this is a direct allusion to Berkeley's choreography from Lloyd Bacon's *Footlight Parade* (1933).[333] Conversely though, according to Jones, the open-legged

[333] Rowell, p. 223.

performers in fact recall Berkeley's work from *42nd Street* (1933), also directed by Bacon. Linking the dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski* to the Bacon film, Jones highlights that it is 'complete with the same style of dancers' shoes and a comparable tracking shot through the chorines' legs.' [334] She also forms a connection with another of Berkeley's films, pointing out that he 'also directed a Carmen Miranda picture, 1943's *The Gang's All Here*. The Coens have mentioned Miranda as an inspiration for the scene, and the *Lebowski* dancers' bowling-pin headdresses appear to directly reference her oversized banana hat.'[335]

With all these links to Berkeley, it is apparent that here the Coen brothers are remediating his films, Miranda and Bacon. All these sources have clearly been remediated in the dream sequence. Indeed, the entire film and their whole canon is an amalgamation of countless sources. Importantly though, this is by no means down to mere imitation, but rather attributable to the remediative approach to filmmaking.

This can be exemplified by returning to Rowell's description of the dream sequence. She asserts that, 'The first and tamest nod to Berkeley comes via the Dude's entrance as a speck casting a giant wall shadow, a visual lifted from [Berkeley's 1935 film] *Gold Diggers of 1935*.' [336] Indeed, the Dude's first appearance in *Gutterballs*, connected above to the opening moments of *What's Opera, Doc?*, can also be read as a recollection of the even earlier Berkeley film, which sees Dick Curtis (Dick Powell), filmed at long range from a high angle, walk towards the screen with a large shadow cast in front of his insignificant figure.[337]

[334] Jones, p. 127.
[335] Ibid., p. 127.
[336] Rowell, p. 223.
[337] *Gold Diggers of 1935*, dir. by Busby Berkeley (First National Pictures, 1935).

Figure 67 - Screenshot from *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935)

Strong parallels can be drawn between this shot from *Gold Diggers of 1935* and the Dude's entrance. However, the link to Berkeley by no means discounts this moment's remediation of the animation. Therefore, the Dude's entrance into the dream sequence should be viewed as an amalgamation, combining the influence of Berkeley and the cartoon. Both are clearly remediated in *Gutterballs*, and as such, the Dude's entrance should be treated as a perfect example of the Coen brothers' use of creative remediation. Just as with the entire dream sequence, and the film overall, a combination of sources inspired it. *Gutterballs* is their recreation of a Berkeley musical interlude, yet it is also influenced by *What's Opera, Doc?* and the operatic work of Wagner, whilst at the same time it also stands as an ode to Hitchcock. It is an amalgam of various remediations which are sometimes hidden in deeper layers of meaning.

Despite all the sources of remediation here though, the key influence for *Gutterballs*, just as with the entire film, is Chandler. This last chapter showed that in *Miller's Crossing*, for the Coen brothers. all roads led to Hammett, meaning that the recollections of external sources could be traced back to the author through layers of remediation. With *The Big Lebowski*, it is just as valid to assert that all roads lead to Chandler in a similar way. Even though there is a feast of inspirations

remediated in the dream sequence, including Berkeley, Hitchcock, Bugs Bunny, and countless others, Chandler's influence is never entirely absent. The entire sequence represents a knowing continuation of Chandler's style, for as Jones points out, the author 'often included hallucinations in his novels (like the Dude's dream sequences).'[338] However, just as the Coen brothers remediated Chandler indirectly through recollections of Altman's version of his work, the dream sequence also remediates another Marlowe adaptation. Whilst the Stranger's introduction to the sequence, detailed previously, is indebted to the hard-boiled writing style of Chandler himself, the dream is actually another example of the Coen brothers' use of layered remediation, referencing another filmmaker's reading of the author.

The dream sequence appears to evoke the spirit of Chandler by recalling Dmytryk's *Murder, My Sweet*. The film, an adaptation of *Farewell, My Lovely*, was ironically renamed because of leading man Powell's decade-long association with musicals and Berkeley,[339] and the studio's fear that 'the public might think [this film] was another.'[340] Explaining the similarities between the two films, Mottram details how, in *The Big Lebowski*, 'Induced by the Mickey Finn that Treehorn slips into his White Russian, The Dude has an erotic dream. Another Chandler standard, the Coens doubtless picked up on the black-and-white expressionistic nightmares experienced by Dick Powell's Marlowe in Edward Dmytryk's version of *Farewell, My Lovely*.'[341]

Comparing these sequences does indeed offer yet another reading of the Dude's fantasy. As was discussed in relation to the film's connection to Chandler's fiction previously, Rowell is of the opinion that the Stranger's introduction to the dream is the Coen brothers' 'send-up of Chandleresque prose.'[342] Rather than being an attempt to recreate Chandler's novelistic voice, however, the Stranger's narration should be viewed as an appropriation of John Paxton's adaptation of the author for *Murder, My Sweet*. In the novel there is no equivalent to Marlowe's

[338] Jones, p. 154.
[339] John T. Irwin, *Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them: Hard-Boiled Fiction and Film Noir* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 231.
[340] Ivy Press, *HVMP Movie Poster Auction Catalog #640* (Dallas: Heritage Auctions, 2006), p. 44.
[341] Mottram, p. 142.
[342] Rowell, p. 223.

onscreen hallucination, therefore, the Stranger's introduction to the dream sequence, 'Darkness washed over the Dude, darker than a black steer's tookus on a moonless prairie night. There was no bottom,'[343] can only recall Marlowe's (Powell) description of his first trip into unconsciousness in Dmytryk's film. When Marlowe is hit on the back of the head in *Murder, My Sweet*, his voiceover describes how 'A black pool opened up at my feet. I dived in. It had no bottom.'[344] Ignoring the different idioms (one introduction delivered by a 1940s Private Investigator and one by a Frontier-era cowboy) and narrative styles (first-person and third person respectively) it is quite clear that the Stranger's preamble into the Dude's dream is another example where the Coen brothers have been influenced by an adaptation rather than just by Chandler's writing itself.

Not only does the Stranger's introduction to *Gutterballs* recall the earlier Chandler adaptation, but just like in *Murder, My Sweet*, the narrator's dialogue appears to direct events on screen. The voiceover seems to pre-empt the camera, with the lighting giving way to shadow after the narrator takes over, 'Darkness washed over the Dude [...] There was no bottom.'[345] Compare this moment to Marlowe's first journey into unconsciousness in *Murder, My Sweet*. After he is struck 'behind the ear' with a blackjack, the hapless Marlowe lands on the ground. As his narration details how 'A black pool opened up at my feet,' a black liquid effect encroaches from the edges of the camera, meeting in the middle to envelop the scene as the protagonist concludes, 'I dived in. It had no bottom'.[346]

[343] *The Big Lebowski*.
[344] *Murder, My Sweet*, dir. by Edward Dmytryk (RKO Radio Pictures, 1944).
[345] *The Big Lebowski*.
[346] *Murder, My Sweet*.

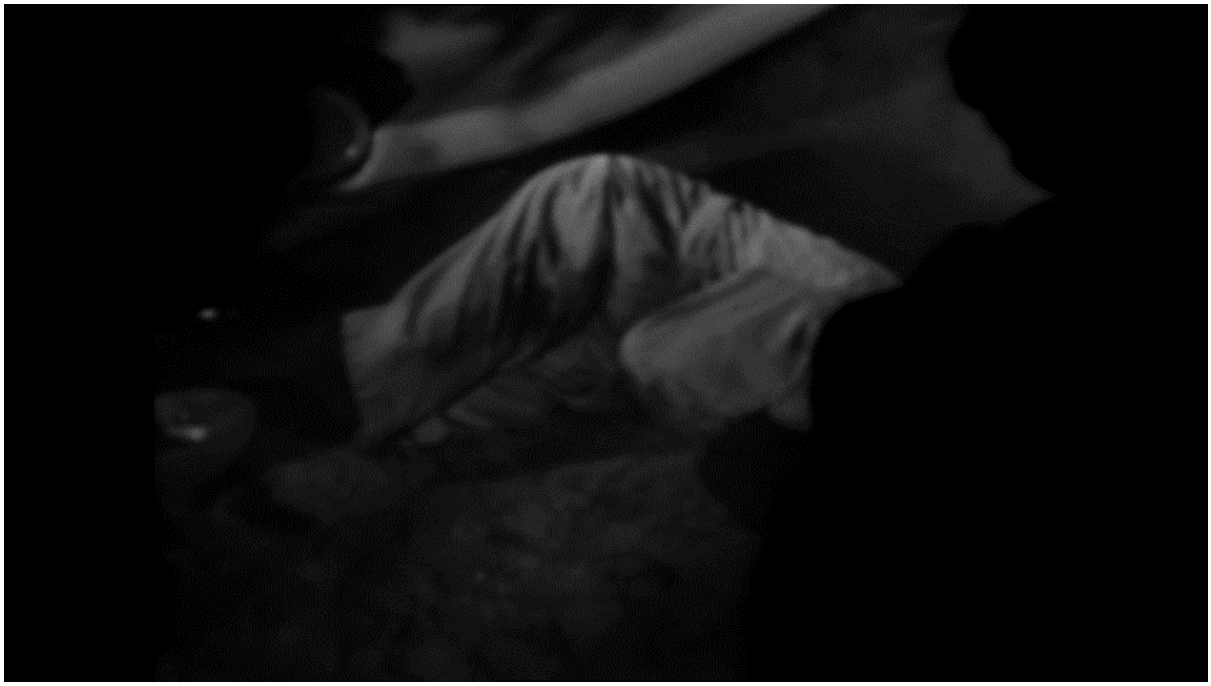

Figure 68 - Screenshot from *Murder, My Sweet* (1944)

It is clear that the Coen brothers are remediating *Murder, My Sweet* in the introduction to their dream sequence, rather than Chandler's writing directly, once again demonstrating the layered style of remediation they employ in their filmmaking. The Stranger's narration is similar to both Chandler's own narrative voice and to the version employed in Dmytryk's adaptation. However, it is altered, with a third-person narrator, who also happens to be a cowboy, delivering the voiceover in a distinctive manner that stands as the perfect example of the Coen brothers' style of remediation.

The introduction to the dream is the only truly comparable moment between the two films. Considered in its entirety, however, the styling employed in the Dude's fantasy can be linked to Dmytryk's film. When Marlowe is struck with a gun by Jules Amthor (Otto Kruger) he again finds himself unconscious: 'The black pool opened up at my feet again, and I dived in.' This time though, when the black liquid effect subsides, Marlowe enters 'a crazy, coked-up dream.' Literally tumbling into the scene, Marlowe is faced with his adversaries before falling into a full-blown

nightmare where he is chased relentlessly by the doctor (Ralf Harolde) who has drugged him.[347]

Figure 69 - Screenshot from *Murder, My Sweet* (1944)

Figure 70 - Screenshot from *Murder, My Sweet* (1944)

[347] Ibid.

The nightmare Marlowe is trapped in is highly visual and stylised. Mottram described it as ‘expressionistic’, but it could also be viewed as belonging to the Surrealist aesthetic, suggesting that the influence of *Murder, My Sweet* was amalgamated with the Dali dreamscape of *Spellbound* in the minds of the Coen brothers, creating the look and atmosphere of the Dude’s amalgamated fantasy, especially after it descends into the realm of nightmare.

In this case then, Mottram only partly recognises the inspiration behind the dream sequence. The same is also true of Rowell, who advocates a Hitchcockian and psychoanalytical reading. Tyree and Walters who argue for a *Looney Tunes* inspired analysis, and Levine who cannot see past Berkeley’s influence. None of these possible readings is necessarily wrong despite the obvious contradictions between them, because, instead of there being a single source of inspiration for the Coen brothers, there are in fact many. The dream sequence certainly recalls Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*, beautifully illustrated by the giant scissors wielded by the Nihilists, therefore it also represents a nod to the Surrealist art movement associated with Dali. At the same time though, it is also their remediation of *What’s Opera, Doc?* and Wagner’s opera. The recollection of *Looney Tunes*, and its associated standing in the history of pop culture, meanwhile also raises the influence of Americana, which in turn can lead back to Chandler’s writing.

At the same time though, the Dude’s fantasy is shaped by the Coen brothers’ admiration for Berkeley’s musical routines, themselves sometimes incorporated in the works of other filmmakers, like Bacon, or more closely associated with their stars, as is the case with Miranda in *The Gang’s All Here*. Finally, though, the dream sequence’s inclusion is also a way to recall Dmytryk’s *Murder, My Sweet*, itself a Chandler adaptation, and hypermediatively link to the wider history of both film noir and American Detective fiction. The Dude’s dream is inspired by all these sources at various points, ensuring that it stands as a tour de force of remediation. This, however, does not mean that the sequence is simply an imitation of its inspirations.

The Coen brothers have never hidden the myriad of sources which have influenced their filmmaking. In fact, *Gutterballs* is a perfect example of their tendency to recall their inspirations. Yet, despite this, the scene is still an original

one. It may channel Hitchcock, Chandler, Bugs Bunny, Berkeley, and many others, but it is still the Dude's dream, a Coen brothers sequence. By remediating motifs and elements from all of these sources of influence, as well as evoking the touchpoints these moments also refer to, this dream sequence brings together and merges multiple inspirations into one sprawling scene which manages to synthesise all the different facets of its original sources, whist maintaining its own creative identity at the same time. This is not a mere imitation of Chandler, Berkeley, or anything else, instead it is an amalgam of influences created by the Coen brothers.

This logic applies to *The Big Lebowski* as a whole. It may take ideas for structure, certain plot threads, character models, and its dream sequence from various sources, but these elements are pieced together in a way which fits the Dude's story, themes and the setting in its own way. As Rowell phrases it, 'In sewing so many story lines and details from songs, movies, and Chandler stories, *Lebowski* keeps life, culture, and the narrative ball rolling on, so to speak.'[348] Few would judge that *The Big Lebowski*, for all of its recollections of multiple sources, is anything other than a film by the Coen brothers, whose remediative filmmaking guarantees their films' originality and ensures their claims of authorship.

[348] Rowell, p. 238.

Chapter Four - Completing the Trinity: The Direct Remediation of Cain and the Revisitation of Hitchcock

Following the extensive remediation of Chandler's work, and further adaptations of it, in *The Big Lebowski*, it would be fair to assume that the Coen brothers had fully addressed the hard-boiled trinity. However, three years later, they revisited these influences once more with *The Man Who Wasn't There*. The film contradicts their previously stated aim not to repeat themselves by reutilising the American Detective fiction so fundamental to their three previous hard-boiled films. Ignoring *Blood Simple*, Shannon Scott Clute and Richard Edwards note how 'three of the Coen brothers' finest films, their so-called "noir trilogy" of *Miller's Crossing* [...] *The Big Lebowski* [...] and *The Man Who Wasn't There* [...] are their tributes to the hard-boiled masters Hammett, Chandler, and [...] Cain respectively, and the films bear many self-conscious traces of reuse and reworking of the source material.'[349] It is possible that Clute and Edwards are framing their argument in terms of individual literary inspiration, excluding *Blood Simple* as it utilises both Hammett and Cain. In a way then, *The Man Who Wasn't There* completes the Coen brothers' trinity; films focusing in turn on Hammett, Chandler and Cain as principal influences. Of course, as with their other films, various sources are remediated into *The Man Who Wasn't There* from different media. This chapter will address how the film continues the Coen brothers' remediation of Hitchcock's body of work, through the influence of *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). As well as this though, the film (re)captures the feel, tone and specific moments from other films, culture, and society itself. An exploration of these remediations requires analysis of the wider film noir movement and its 'grey' offshoot, Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), and even the imagery of 1950s science-fiction. This chapter begins, however, by exploring the hard-boiled roots of *The Man Who Wasn't There* through its evocation of Cain's work, notably both *Double Indemnity* (1936) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934).

[349] Shannon Scott Clute and Richard L. Edwards, *The Maltese Touch of Evil: Film Noir and Potential Criticism* (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), p. 47.

The remediation of Cain in *The Man Who Wasn't There* sees the Coen brothers repeating themselves, as he was one of the sources remediated in *Blood Simple*. Noting the link between the two films, Doom asserts that

> the Coen brothers' ninth picture [*The Man Who Wasn't There*] [...] returned to their [filmmaking] roots with the gritty world of James M. Cain. Their first film, *Blood Simple*, brought a modern take to Cain's domestic noir formula; so, fittingly enough, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is an odd take on that same recipe [...] It represents their ultimate tribute to film noir, a black and white tale of blackmail, murder, betrayal, adultery, desire, greed, and the bizarre.[350]

It is not repetition per se though, because *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn't There* act as counterpoints to one another, the former presented as a contemporary neo-noir evolution of the original style, whilst the latter returns to the monochromatic aesthetic and origins of the noir style. For M. Keith Booker, however, *The Man Who Wasn't There* only represents an imitation of the past, as the film takes 'the practice of genre pastiche to a new high. Here, they literally attempt to recreate, from beginning to end, the classic film noir – in terms of both style and content.'[351] Booker, however, neglects two important aspects of the film. *The Man Who Wasn't There* does indeed recreate a classic film noir aesthetic, yet, as I shall demonstrate, it does not belong to the noir school, but is rather an evolution of the style which reflects their own predilection for offering forms of commentary (here, social). Instead of being viewed as a mere work of pastiche then, *The Man Who Wasn't There* should be seen as a film demonstrating the practice of creative remediation.

In their analysis of the film, David Madden and Kristopher Mecholsky note that since the decline of the classic film noir, Cain's work has routinely been overlooked, with 'direct adaptations [remaining] scarce'. However, as they point out:

> in terms of Cain's influence the neo-noir period has been richer even than the classic film noir period. Even as Cain effectively disappeared from official Hollywood production, he was influencing deeply a new generation of filmmakers in the eighties, nineties, and 2000s. The Coen brothers are the most obvious – and successful – of those filmmakers. They have acknowledged that two of their films – *Blood Simple* and *The*

[350] Doom, p. 111.
[351] M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood: What's New in Film and why it Makes us Feel so Strange* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), p. 97.

> *Man Who Wasn't There* – are directly influenced by Cain's characters and works, the entirety of which they say they have read.[352]

It is the work of Cain which shapes both these films, but despite the period of its production, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is not a neo-noir. It should instead be viewed as a film gris, a distinctive offshoot of the classic film noir. Film gris (literal translation 'grey film')

> was a term coined by critic Thom Andersen [...] to group together a distinctive cycle of films [of the noir family] [...] Andersen distinguished film gris from other film noir because of their drab and depressing social realism that was more naturalistically photographed than the high-contrast chiaroscuro that [characterised] the majority of films noir [...] The emphasis in film gris falls not on individual problems but on the inequalities of capitalism, on its class divisions and rampant materialism, using crime as a social critique. Film gris often showed the blurred boundaries between 'enterprise' and criminality [...] [and] have a pervasive sense of guilt and paranoia, their grim stories depicting a brutal and violent society.[353]

This description seems to fit the plot of the Coen brothers' film. The protagonist, Ed Crane (Billy Bob Thornton), is trapped in the monotony of a sexless marriage with his successful wife Doris (McDormand), whilst remaining unfulfilled in his job as 'the barber'. When an opportunity arises to allow Ed to become involved in a dry cleaning business with Creighton Tolliver (Polito), he sees his chance to move up the class ladder; all he has to do is blackmail Doris' boss-cum-lover, Big Dave Brewster (James Gandolfini). Unfortunately, Big Dave finds out that Ed is behind the blackmail, and in the ensuing confrontation the latter kills the former. Doris is subsequently arrested for the murder and commits suicide, affording Ed the chance to pursue a career as a music manager. However, Ed is then connected to the murder of Tolliver, who was actually killed by Big Dave, and is sentenced to death.[354] In *The Man Who Wasn't There*, all Ed wants is the chance to escape his drab profession: the tale of murder and death which follows only happens because of his attempts to change his social standing and take employment in higher levels of the capitalist system. The scenario of this film closely conforms to Andersen's definition of the film gris, suggesting that the film is not a neo-noir presented as a pastiche of classic noir, but rather an example of film gris. This distinction

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[352] David Madden and Kristopher Mecholsky, *James M. Cain: Hard-Boiled Mythmaker* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 162.
[353] Andrew Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 92.
[354] *The Man Who Wasn't There*, dir. by Joel Coen (Good Machine, 2001).

remediatively allows the film to also function as a critique of a morally inept social construct – the capitalist ladder.

In *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (2009) though, James Naremore makes reference to the fact that Andersen himself had reservations about film gris' existence as a separate entity, before suggesting that, 'Any new stipulation [of films noir and gris] would only create more confusion.'[355] Naremore, however, also makes the case for the Coen brothers' venture into film gris when he notes that it 'has already been proposed by other historians, who [...] distinguish between "the 'pure' black cinema of *Nightmare Alley* and *Double Indemnity* and the excursions into "[grey]" melodrama of the adapters of Hammett, Chandler, and Graham Greene."'[356] Cain's work is paired with that of Chandler and Hammett to form the so-called trinity of hard-boiled writers, so by including this analysis of film gris, Naremore is inadvertently grouping *The Man Who Wasn't There* together with the morally downbeat world Andersen originally posited as belonging to the grey noir, reinforcing that the Coen brothers' film is indeed a film gris.

Returning to the previous criticism levelled at *The Man Who Wasn't There* by Booker, regarding its standing as a form of pastiche; of course, all the Coen brothers' hard-boiled films will instinctively recall classic film noir by association. After all, Cain and his contemporaries were responsible for many of the sources for those films. However, just because *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn't There* were influenced by Cain, and the film noir which his fiction inspired, this does not make these films works of 'genre pastiche'. Going into further detail regarding their sources of inspiration, Madden and Mecholsky describe the nuanced mixture of Cain stories which are remediated in these two Coen brothers' films. '*Blood Simple* [...] was written specifically as "a James M. Cain story ... in a modern context"; and *The Man Who Wasn't There* manages to draw on both *Double Indemnity* and [the short story] *Career in C Major* [1943] in its "structure and design ... [and exploration of] the congregation of the exceptional and the mundane."'[357] Just as *Miller's Crossing* was a remediative amalgamation of Hammett, and *The Big Lebowski* was their Chandler remediation, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is also

[355] James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (California: University of California Press, 2008), p. 124.
[356] Ibid., p. 124.
[357] Madden and Mecholsky, p. 162.

an amalgamous film, this time though through the remediation of Cain's fiction. Madden and Mecholsky correctly identify that the film is a construct of multiple Cain plots, however, they do not discuss *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, whose narrative blends with details from *Double Indemnity* to produce the Cain amalgamation that is *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

As Madden and Mecholsky note, 'Of the two Cain films from the Coens, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is the more reliant on Cain's original work.'[358] However, they then identify Ed as 'a convoluted, mash-up product of various Cain characters who manages to invoke a number of their weaknesses and few of their strengths.'[359] Here, Madden and Mecholsky are wrong, because even though the situation Ed finds himself in can be viewed as an amalgamation of various Cain plots, his role in the film's proceedings puts him at an advantage over many of Cain's own protagonists. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the film's presentation of the classic Cain love triangle.

As Mottram observes, Cain's fiction does not take the form of 'detective mysteries in the Chandler/Hammett vein, but [rather] novels concerning crimes of passion, usually centring on the betrayal of a man by the woman he has fallen for.'[360] Lust, love and murder play a key role in much of Cain's fiction, especially in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*, usually through the form of a deadly love triangle which results in death for all involved. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, for example, the central character, a drifter named Frank Chambers, one day finds himself in a roadside diner owned by Nick Papadakis, a Greek immigrant. Taking a job at the diner, Frank embarks on a passionate affair with the Greek's wife Cora, which leads to them plotting Nick's murder. On the second attempt they succeed, and although suspicion falls on them, they get away with it. In the end though, Cora is killed in a car accident, and Frank is sentenced to death for her murder, the one he did not actually commit.[361] In *Double Indemnity* on the other hand, insurance salesman Walter Huff becomes entangled with the femme fatale Phyllis Nirdlinger when he tries to renew her husband's vehicle policy. Convinced he can beat the system he is a part of (breaking the capitalist ladder

[358] Ibid., p. 162.
[359] Ibid., p. 162.
[360] Mottram, p. 26.
[361] James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (London: Orion, 2005), pp. 1-116.

system), Huff, driven by an animalistic lust for Phyllis, murders the husband. However, Huff develops real feelings for Nirdlinger's daughter, Lola, and after she is arrested for another crime, the insurance man confesses to the murder, implicating Phyllis, before the novel ends with the two lovers on the brink of suicide.[362]

Some commentators believe that the Coen brothers unsuccessfully tried to replicate the classic Cain love triangle in *Blood Simple*, between Ray, his lover Abby, and her husband Marty. On this point, Mottram notes that, 'One of the criticisms levelled at the film [...] was that the central pairing of Ray and Abby was weak and passionless [a description never attributed to] Frank and Cora [the counterparts] from *Blood Simple*'s literary model [...] *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.'[363] Indeed, Hinson observes that

> In [Cain's novel], Frank and Cora were so hot for each other that sparks seemed to arc between them; their passion was so volatile that it almost *had* to erupt into violence. There are no comparable sexual fireworks between the lovers in *Blood Simple*; it's a tepid affair [...] the sympathetic lovers are upstaged by their loathsome adversaries. Their low-watt rapport leaves a dark, empty space at the [centre] of the film.[364]

Hinson dismisses the Coen brothers' depiction of the affair so central to Cain's stories of murder. Similarly, framing his own argument around Hinson's views, Mottram concludes, 'it leads one to believe that this is not quite the classic love triangle sported in the work of Cain.'[365] However, it is possible that the critics who saw Ray and Abby's affair as a damp squib in comparison to Frank and Cora's passion overlook a key feature of the Coen brothers' filmmaking. Namely, that when remediating influential sources, they routinely alter events to suit their own purposes at the deepest level. Therefore, whilst the affair in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was 'so hot' that it '*had* to erupt into violence', the carnage that unfolds in *Blood Simple* then has little to do with a passionless affair. Instead, in a biting social commentary, the film is suggesting that unfavourable social circumstances can lead to violence, or, as she is the only survivor, that Abby was simply using Ray to get herself out of her position in society; which creates a series of

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[362] James M. Cain, *Double Indemnity* (London: Orion, 2005), pp. 1-136.
[363] Mottram, pp. 21-22.
[364] Hinson, p. 7.
[365] Mottram, p. 22.

hypermediative through-lines to classic Hollywood and the depiction of the femme fatale.

It is therefore highly likely that *Blood Simple* presents the Coen brothers' own take on the classic Cain love triangle, a view supported by considering the love triangle in their other Cain film, *The Man Who Wasn't There*. In both examples presented above, the basic construct of the relationships is similar, with a male third party entering the fray and embarking on a sexually driven affair with a married woman. In both of Cain's novels, the torrid affair leads to the adulterers planning and committing what they think is the perfect murder of the husband. The plans, however, backfire. Yet, in *The Man Who Wasn't There* the Coen brothers skew the dynamic of the deadly love triangle in the favour of the wronged party. In their version of the triangle, the husband, Ed, discovers his wife's affair and takes advantage of the situation. However, it is this plan, one of blackmail and not murder, which unravels, and confronting the adulterer, Big Dave, Ed stabs him with a pen, inadvertently killing him. The subsequent investigation implicates Ed's unfaithful wife Doris, who is arrested for the murder and then kills herself. Ed has unwittingly destroyed the triangle; he has gotten away with an imperfect murder he did not plan, and in the process disentangled himself from a passionless marriage.[366] Although he is later charged for a murder he had nothing to do with, Ed seemingly contradicts the Cain love triangle. He is the wronged party and gets away with a murder which is neither premeditated nor perfect. He gets rid of his wife in the process and engages in (what he thinks is) a purely platonic relationship with a young woman. Moreover, in the tradition of Cain's fiction, as well as of wider Hollywood conventions, Ed is eventually punished, although not for his actual crimes.

The Man Wasn't There at the same time both conforms to, and completely subverts, the archetypal Cain love triangle, illustrating that the Coen brothers' remediation of their influences is both direct (or conforming), and, at the same time, also indirect (or contrasting). This means that above all else, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is a work of creative remediation; the film is not necessarily faithful to the Cain love triangle in its original guise, but rather employs it, and twists it, to better

[366] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

fit their story. In other words, the Coen brothers reverse the dynamics of Cain's classic love triangle to suit the barber story they wanted their film to tell, perfectly illustrating why their films are works of remediation.

A Specific Cain Influence

This shows that Cain's fiction was a general source remediated in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. In several instances, however, Cain's influence is apparent in a much more specific manner. During the film's conclusion, it is revealed that Ed has been recalling and narrating the story from his cell on death row, where he finds himself after being convicted for the murder of Tolliver. As the scene cuts from his trial to inside the prison where he awaits 'the chair', the camera slowly tracks in on his cell as Ed explains, 'So here I am. At first, I didn't know how I got here. I knew step by step of course, which is what I've told you, step by step.'[367] Clearly this remediates the ending of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, as in the novel, following Cora's death in a car accident, Frank, like Ed, finds himself on death row awaiting execution. The entire novel has been Frank's own story, written in jail. In a similar narrative structure to that present in the final scene of *The Man Who Wasn't There*, the final chapter of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* begins with Frank's trial. After it is revealed that it only took the jury five minutes to agree a verdict, Frank states, in a matter-of-fact way which seems to mirror Ed's declaration in the film, 'So I'm in the death house, now, writing the last of this, so Father McConnell can look it over and show me the places where maybe it ought to be fixed up a little, for punctuation and all that.'[368] This makes it apparent that the finale of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* acted as a direct source of remediation for the Coen brothers. By extension, however, this similarity also means that as well as the ending, the narration and structure of *The Man Who Wasn't There* directly recall *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Of course, this is not the only connection between the novel and the film. Throughout *The Man Who Wasn't There* several moments subtly recall *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. For instance, in the film, Ed decides to extort Big Dave over his affair with Doris in order to get the cash he needs to buy into

[367] Ibid.
[368] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p. 115.

Tolliver's business. In the blackmail note, Ed demands a payment of $10,000 from Big Dave.[369] Whilst this figure may appear to be arbitrary, it directly recalls Cain's fiction. After killing Nick in the Cain novel, Frank is told that Cora stands to receive a life insurance pay-out following her husband's death. Accused of planning the murder with Cora, District Attorney Sackett confronts Frank, suggesting that 'Well I'll tell you what you were knocking him off for. A piece of property out there, for one thing [...] And for that other little Christmas present you and she thought you would get on that boat with [...] *That little $10,000 accident policy that Papadakis carried on his life*.'[370] The fact that this insurance policy is worth exactly the same amount as the sum which Ed extorts out of Big Dave in *The Man Who Wasn't There* is another strong indicator of the level of inspiration which Cain's fiction provided for the Coen brothers' film. Having previously compared the respective endings, Eddie Robson goes on to discuss the more subtle links between the two. Also connecting the significance of the $10,000 figure back to *Blood Simple*, Robson notes that

> [the film's finale] isn't the only motif that the Coens draw from *Postman* [...] There's also the amount of money that Ed tries to get out of Big Dave, $10,000. In *Postman* the life insurance policy pays out to the tune of $10,000, and don't forget that in *Blood Simple* Marty pays Visser $10,000 to take out Abby and Ray [...] Whether it's 1934, 1949 or 1984, $10,000 remains the Cain shorthand for a large sum of money.[371]

Indeed, although the amount which Ed blackmails Big Dave for only seems relevant to the plot of the film, it is in fact yet another recollection of Cain. Incidental if not grasped, this reference is another example of the Coen brothers' remediation of Cain's fiction, showing its influence on their film.

The inspiration of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is not just felt in relation to the plot developments of *The Man Who Wasn't There*, it is also apparent in characterisation. The film features a lawyer named Freddy Riedenschneider (Tony Shalhoub), and whilst it would be wrong to assert that this character was a blatant copy of Katz from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, it is clear that this character did help to shape the presentation of Riedenschneider. Firstly, both characters seem to exude the same air, with both men being shorter than the respective

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[369] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.
[370] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p. 59.
[371] Robson, pp. 271-272

protagonists and being fast talkers. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Katz is introduced as, 'a little guy, about forty years old, with a leathery face and a black moustache,'[372] whilst his dialogue often spans whole paragraphs, is usually repetitive and reads with a frenetic pace, thus opposing the trademark back-and-forth of American Detective fiction.

Having gotten Cora cleared of murder, he begins to detail exactly how he did it. Without actually explaining anything, the entire first paragraph of his account never goes into specifics as he tells Frank:

> Chambers, this is the greatest case I ever had in my life. I'm in it, and out of it, in less than twenty-four hours, and yet I tell you I never had anything like it. Well, the Dempsey-Firpo fight lasted less than two rounds, didn't it? It's not how long it lasts. It's what you do while you're in there.[373]

In comparison, in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Riedenschneider is a diminutive man, of roughly the same age as Katz, and whilst he does not sport facial hair, he seems to mirror many of his defining aspects.[374]

Figure 71 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

[372] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* p. 65.
[373] Ibid., pp. 74-75.
[374] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Additionally, his speeches, which tend to ramble, are delivered with an energy which recalls Katz's pacing and leaves both Ed and the audience in an uncomprehending silence. When Ed first meets with Riedenschneider, the lawyer launches into a breathless introduction, which only demonstrates that he lives off of his clients:

> Look, I don't want to waste your time, so I'll eat while we talk. You mind? You don't mind. So, while I'm in town I'll be staying at the Hotel Metropole, the Turandot Suite. Yeah, it's goofy, the suites are named after operas; room's OK though, I poked around. I'm having 'em hold it for me on account of I'll be back and forth. So, in addition to my retainer, you're paying hotel, living expenses, secretarial, private eye if we need to make inquiries, headshrinker should we go that way. We'll talk about appeals if, as and when. For right now, has she confessed?[375]

During Riedenschneider's 'spiel', the camera cuts back to Ed on several occasions, but before he can say anything, the lawyer carries on talking, only reaching any relevant detail about the case at the end of his monologue. Having also connected the Coen brothers' character to Cain's, Robson details how

> The figure of the lawyer in *Postman* is also similar to the lawyer in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. *Postman*'s lawyer, Katz, delights in the seemingly impossible nature of Frank's case and the (admittedly ingenious) way that he wins it: 'Oh, Chambers, you did me a favour all right when you called me in on this. I'll never get another one like it.' Similarly, Riedenschneider doesn't believe that there's a case he can't win and keeps working in the face of overwhelming evidence. Ironically, he is defending somebody that didn't do it and he should be able to create a reasonable doubt if he's such a great lawyer, but the truth is actually more difficult to prove, even when it is laid before him by Ed. That's because, while Katz really is an excellent lawyer, Riedenschneider talks gibberish in a clever way [...] [a]nd just as Katz knows he'll never get another case like this again, the fact that Doris kills herself before her case comes to trial is regarded by Riedenschneider as [his career's biggest disappointment].[376]

Whilst Robson fleetingly addresses the way in which Riedenschneider ignores Ed's 'reveal' of the truth, he overlooks the fact that this is the most significant way in which the character is remediating Katz.

It has already been shown that Katz routinely gushes about how this is the greatest case of his career, so much so that it becomes clear that he does not care

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[375] Ibid.
[376] Robson, p. 272.

about justice, just about winning. This is apparent after the first trial in the novel, when, having cleared Frank and Cora, he finishes his summary of how he did it by saying, 'One minute, one minute, you two. Not so fast. There's one other little thing. That ten thousand dollars you get for knocking off the Greek.'[377] Whilst this turns out to be Katz's way of addressing his own payment, it reveals that he knows that they did kill Nick, yet still defended them. Similarly, in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, it appears that Riedenschneider cares as little about justice as Katz. After Ed tells the lawyer that Doris has not confessed, 'No of course not, she didn't do it,' Riedenschneider states, 'Good. That helps. Not that she didn't do it, that she didn't confess.' [378] Riedenschneider does not care about the question of guilt or innocence, as evidenced by his glib attitude to whether or not Doris did it, all he seems to be concerned with is the intrigue and profile of the case, so much so that when Doris kills herself before the trial, the lawyer offers no sympathy, simply stating 'I don't understand it. I had a real shot at this, I could have won this thing. It doesn't make any sense.'[379] Just like Katz in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, it appears that Riedenschneider considers justice to be an afterthought, all that drives him is the chance to win. All the similarities between the two lawyers strongly suggests that *The Postman Always Rings Twice* served as a specific source remediated by the Coen brothers, not just in terms of plot details, but even down to characterisation. Moreover, the fact that both these lawyers do not care about justice or questions of guilt, only victory, suggests that the Coen brothers are remediating Cain to comment on the state of a legal system which values winning over doing the right thing.

The above examples provide just three incidences where *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was clearly remediated in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. However, this does not mean that the film can simply be classed as an uncredited adaptation of Cain's novel. Instead, it takes inspiration from several elements of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to elevate the story of a laconic barber into one which would fit in the hard-boiled world of American Detective fiction, a perfect example which shows why the film should instead be regarded as a work of remediation. Whilst much of Cain's oeuvre arguably inspired *The Man Who Wasn't*

[377] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p. 81.
[378] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.
[379] Ibid.

There, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* clearly acted as the most direct source of remediation. Yet, as was previously highlighted, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is the Coen brothers' Cain amalgamation just as *Miller's Crossing* is their Hammett one and *The Big Lebowski* is their amalgamative remediation of Chandler. As such, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is by no means the only Cain text which directly influenced the film. This is evident when comparing aspects of the film to Cain's *Double Indemnity*.

The most recognisable connection between *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *Double Indemnity* is evident when considering the main characters. In the film, Ed is the man of the title, he is a nobody going nowhere in life, introducing himself by saying, 'Yeah, I worked in a barber shop. But I never considered myself a barber. I stumbled into it, or married into it more precisely [...] Me, I don't talk much... I just cut the hair.'[380] Ed's laconic narration perfectly captures his disillusion and detachment from his life. He does not consider himself a barber, he just does the job. His life is a simple, if unfulfilling, one, and he only becomes embroiled in the hard-boiled world of crime after Tolliver offers him an opportunity to invest in dry cleaning. It is the chance to move up the social ladder, to change careers and gain some respect which sparks the chain of events which lead to Ed narrating from death row.[381] He is an ordinary, and in many ways dull, man, who in trying to escape the drudgery of cutting hair finds himself caught up in a tangled web of murder: this also represents a critique of the fallacy of the American Dream, which suggests that a man like Ed should be able to advance.

This is also true of Cain's creation Huff. Having spent 'fifteen years in the insurance business,'[382] Huff becomes infatuated with Phyllis whilst trying to renew her husband's car coverage. Conforming to the archetype of the femme fatale, Phyllis enquires about an 'accident policy', and Huff knows she plans to murder Mr Nirdlinger. However, because he is so besotted by her, the insurance agent does not turn her in, and insisting that she 'had better have somebody help' her, Huff finds himself contemplating defrauding his own company, for Phyllis and the money.[383] Spending several pages outlining the best way to get away with the

[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Cain, *Double Indemnity*, p. 13.
[383] Ibid., p. 19.

murder using his insider knowledge, Huff hatches the plan to make the policy pay out double (the titular indemnity clause), and almost justifying his impending crime, 'Say, this is a beauty, if I do say it myself. I didn't spend all this time in the business for nothing, did I?'[384] Huff believes he can beat the system, getting both the money and the girl. The murder could lead to a new, and he thinks better, life. Of course, this ends badly for Huff and Phyllis, and just as was the case with Ed in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, ambition and a desire to change his standing leads Huff into the hard-boiled world of murder. Both Huff and Ed are ordinary men, whose dissatisfaction with life leads them to murder, meaning that the dreams which motivated their stories in the first place remain unfulfilled at the finale, a remediated inversion of the American Dream. This shows that the Coen brothers were influenced not just by one novel, but rather by a variety of Cain's works, and *Double Indemnity* also provided the inspiration for an important character in the film.

As I have shown, the Coen brothers used the character of Katz from *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as a template for their own lawyer in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. The characterisation of Riedenschneider is clearly indebted to Cain's novel, and the same is also true in relation to the character of Birdy (Scarlett Johansson). This time taking inspiration from *Double Indemnity*, it is easy to connect the Coen brothers' young female character to Cain's Lola Nirdlinger. Of course, the obvious similarity between the two characters is rooted in the fact that both are youngsters on the verge of adulthood. However, a much more meaningful link exists between Birdy and Lola, in terms of their relationships with the protagonists of their respective stories. In *Double Indemnity*, Lola is Nirdlinger's daughter, and she is initially introduced as a witness to Huff's attempt to sell her father insurance.[385] However, Huff begins to develop a fondness for the girl, an emotion he feels is reciprocated, 'She liked me, I could see that.'[386] As the symbol of innocence in *Double Indemnity*, Lola becomes Huff's potential escape from the murky world he is lured into, a form of moral redemption. She is the antithesis of Phyllis' femme fatale, the wholesome girl compared to the man-eater, the light to the dark. As Huff tries to describe:

[384] Ibid., p. 25.
[385] Ibid., p. 29.
[386] Ibid., p. 32.

> Maybe I haven't explained it right, yet, how I felt about this girl Lola. It wasn't anything like what I had felt for Phyllis. That was some kind of unhealthy excitement that came over me just at the sight of her. This wasn't anything like that. It was just a sweet peace that came over me as soon as I was with her, like when we would drive along for an hour without saying a word, and then she would look up at me and we still didn't have to say anything [...] maybe I could marry her, and forget the whole thing, and be happy with her for the rest of my life.[387]

For Huff, Lola represents an escape, and although he is in love with her, nothing suggests that the attraction is sexual. Their relationship is platonic, the opposite of the animalistic lust which drove Huff to Phyllis and murder. So pure are his feelings for the youngster that when Lola is implicated for attempting to murder him, actually carried out by Phyllis, he admits to everything in order to protect her.[388]

The platonic love between Huff and Lola provided the inspiration for the relationship between Ed and Birdy in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Ed's marriage to Doris is not one of love, or respect, but rather of convenience. Describing his first meeting with Doris, Ed details how, 'I'd met Doris blind on a double date with a loud-mouth buddy who was seeing a friend of hers from work [...] At the end of the night she said she liked that I didn't talk much. It was only a couple of weeks later she suggested we get married.' Ed's voiceover is broken then as Big Dave phones the house asking to meet him, he has uncovered the truth regarding the blackmail attempt, and during their confrontation, Ed kills him. Returning home, and perhaps conveying the lack of feeling in their marriage, Ed picks up his previous narrative thread, concluding that

> It was only a couple of weeks later she suggested we get married. I said 'Don't you want to get to know me more?' She said 'Why, does it get better?' She looked at me like I was a dope, which I never really minded from her, and she had a point, I guess. We knew each other as well then as now. Anyway, well enough.[389]

Just as Huff's feelings for Lola were the antithesis to his attraction to Phyllis, in *The Man Who Wasn't There* Ed's emotionless union with Doris is in stark contrast to the relationship he forms with Birdy. Listening to her play the piano brings him the peace and contentment that Doris never could. As the story unfolds, Ed begins to dream of another new career, this time as Birdy's music manager, another chance

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[387] Ibid., pp. 102-103.
[388] Ibid., pp. 114-120.
[389] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

for him to make himself happy; his own form of moral redemption following Doris' suicide. Just like in Cain's novel, the Coen brothers never imply any form of sexual relationship between the young girl and the protagonist. Importantly, it is a platonic bond offering a form of escape, a fact underlined when Birdy does make a sexual advance towards Ed, causing him to crash his car and being arrested for Tolliver's murder.[390] Just as Huff's love for Lola led to his confession, Ed's relationship with Birdy represents his downfall. Referencing the similarities between Birdy and Lola, as well as in their respective relationships with the male protagonists, Booker notes that

> For Crane, both Birdy and her music become emblems of what is missing from his current life [...] he dreams of giving up his job as a barber in order to manage Birdy's [music] career [...] thereby helping her and at the same time gaining the opportunity, as he puts it, to 'be with her. Enough to keep myself feeling okay. Why couldn't that work?' [...] Birdy as the pubescent object of Crane's middle-aged desire, is the direct successor to James M. Cain's Lola Nirdlinger [...] In [*Double Indemnity*] [Walter Huff's relationship with Lola represents] something pure and unsoiled amid the tawdriness of his life.[391]

The link between Birdy and Lola couples together with the similarities between Ed and Huff to unmistakeably recall *Double Indemnity*. Just as Lola is the symbol of betterment for Huff in Cain's novel, so too is Birdy the peaceful embodiment of a new life for Ed in the Coen brothers' film. The character of Birdy is undoubtedly the Coen brothers' version of Lola, just as Ed is their take on Huff, highlighting that *Double Indemnity* was as much a source of remediation as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

It is, however, not just in terms of characterisation where similarities can be found with *Double Indemnity*, the Coen brothers even recall it through character names as well as their personalities. In *Double Indemnity*, Huff finds himself dealing with the Nirdlinger family, and it is this entanglement which brings about his downfall. In homage to Cain, and the pivotal role which the Nirdlinger family play in *Double Indemnity*, the Coen brothers include a subtle reference to the name in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. In what may just seem like a throwaway allusion (if the audience do not connect it back to Cain's novel it bears no impact upon the

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[390] Ibid.
[391] Booker, pp. 99-100.

story, but it does carry remediative weight if noticed), Big Dave has married into the Nirdlinger family, finding himself in charge of their department store. Simply named 'Nirdlinger's', it also happens to be where Doris works, and as such, although not essential to the film's plot, the Nirdlinger name, so central to *Double Indemnity*, hovers over the periphery of *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Picking up on this connection and using it to link the Coen brothers' feature to Wilder's film of *Double Indemnity* (1944) (which in a hard-boiled twist of fate was scripted by Chandler), Booker argues that the Coen brothers' employment of the Nirdlinger name

> is clearly meant to signal this connection to Cain's novel, though the more obvious connection, in terms of both theme and style, is to Billy Wilder's 1944 cinematic version of *Double Indemnity*. In the film, however [...] the Nirdlinger family name is changed to Dietrichson, so that the Coens' use of the Nirdlinger name clearly indicates the novel, rather than the film. In addition, *The Man Who Wasn't There* also includes a coroner named [Diedrickson], thus acknowledging the name change.[392]

The inclusion of the Nirdlinger name in *The Man Who Wasn't There* can only recall Cain's novel, but showing their awareness of the adaptation, the Coen brothers also recall the film at least twice.

The obvious instance comes through the name of the medical examiner. Following Doris' suicide, Dr Diedrickson (Alan Fudge) seeks out Ed in order to break the news that his wife was pregnant when she died.[393] Despite the fact that Diedrickson has a different spelling and is reduced to little more than a cameo role, it clearly recalls the Wilder film, where the Dietrichson family are central. However, arguably the bigger reference is presented visually at an earlier point in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, suggesting that the adaptation of Cain's novel was also remediated by the Coen brothers.

In the first act of *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Ed, Doris and her brother Frank Raffo (Michael Badalucco), attend a family reception to celebrate a cousin's marriage. Dressed for a warm and sunny day, a reluctant and increasingly drunk

[392] Booker, p. 100.
[393] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Doris stalks around in a floppy sunhat and sunglasses, wearing a lightly coloured dress and with her shoulder length blonde hair on display.[394]

Figure 72 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

If the viewer is familiar with Wilder's film, this moment immediately recalls one of its most iconic scenes. As the net begins to close on the renamed Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) following their murder of Mr Dietrichson (Tom Powers), Neff arranges a clandestine meeting with Phyllis at Jerry's Market. Phyllis arrives, wearing a white blouse and sporting a pair of sunglasses, nearly identical in style to those modelled by Doris in *The Man Who Wasn't There*.[395]

[394] Ibid.
[395] *Double Indemnity*, dir. by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1944).

Figure 73 - Screenshot from *Double Indemnity* (1944)

The way Phyllis is presented during this scene, with her shoulder-length blonde hair perfectly framing her face and the shaded glasses, foretells Doris' appearance. Interestingly, the contexts of these scenes are in direct contrast to each other in terms of their placement in the wider plot of their respective films. In *Double Indemnity*, the shot of Phyllis comes after the pivotal murder, making it clear that she is the femme fatale. Yet, in *The Man Who Wasn't There* this visual of Doris is presented before any of the film's deaths, meaning that this scene, with the added significance of visually establishing Doris as a femme fatale, may be overlooked. For although these two scenes are not similar in terms of locale, timing, theme or indeed content, there is a very striking visual match between Doris and Phyllis. Hinting at Doris' role in the upcoming tangle of death in the Coen brothers' film, this match suggests that she has a connection to Wilder's Phyllis. Doris is by no means the complete femme fatale of classic film noir, but she is certainly a key part of the debauchery which *The Man Who Wasn't There* assembles, and this moment which links her to Phyllis hints at her role in the rest of the film's plot.

If, however, the audience do not know the earlier film, or simply do not realise that the Coen brothers are alluding to it in this scene, then it does not matter, as Doris' role in proceedings is explained in the film itself. Yet, if the viewer does

recognise this remediation, then this moment carries an extra layer of meaning. The visual similarity between the two characters at this point of the film suggests that Doris will assume the role of the femme fatale, ensuring that, even though she is wrongfully arrested for her lover's death and commits suicide in prison, her character and circumstances elicit little sympathy. This is the perfect illustration of the Coen brothers' use of creative remediation. Their films, as in this example, contain hints to other sources, pointing to a further layer of meaning which informs the story which they are telling. Yet, whilst understanding every remediation will help the audience ascertain meaning at an earlier point, the Coen brothers do not penalise those who do not infer these connections as the plot explains everything on its own. The richness of the Coen brothers' remediation allows them to evoke the sources which have inspired them, but the audience do not necessarily need to understand these to comprehend the wider film. This moment also exemplifies that in *The Man Who Wasn't There* the influence of the author also extends into film.

A Hitchcockian Shadow

As is the case with every one of the Coen brothers' films though, cinema also influenced *The Man Who Wasn't There*, especially the work of Hitchcock. *Psycho* and *Torn Curtain* were recalled in *Blood Simple*, whilst *The Big Lebowski* evoked both *North by Northwest* and *Spellbound*. *The Man Who Wasn't There* sees the Coen brothers imbue their work with another Hitchcockian shadow through its remediation of *Shadow of a Doubt*. For many critics, including Andrew Pulver, the spirit of Hitchcock is overlooked in relation to the Coen brothers' ninth film, as the only connection they see between the two films is that *The Man Who Wasn't There* takes place in Santa Rosa, California, 'the same town [...] as Hitchcock's 1943 noir'.[396] Joel himself confirms that their 'movie takes place in Santa Rosa in 1949, the same time and setting as Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, which, along with *Psycho*, is probably my favourite Hitchcock film.'[397]

The decision to locate *The Man Who Wasn't There* in Santa Rosa also strengthens the film's pulp connections, as the Californian town is also where

[396] Andrew Pulver, 'Pictures That Do The Talking', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 149-159 (p. 152).
[397] McKenna, p. 179.

'Chandler's Philip Marlowe was born.'[398] However, as Robson asserts during his analysis, the shared locale is merely an indication of the film's kinship with Hitchcock's 1940s noir. He notes that Santa Rosa's 'previous claim to fame [was] that it was the setting for […] *Shadow of a Doubt* [...] Although the plot of *The Man Who Wasn't There* is very different, the Coens acknowledge that *Shadow of a Doubt* influenced their thinking and the slow pace of both movies gives them a not dissimilar atmosphere.'[399] Robson identifies a deeper link between the two films than merely a shared setting. Indeed, upon closer analysis, the shadow of the Hitchcock film looms over the visual style, plot, and even individual characters of *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Doom remarks that the choice to set the film in Santa Rosa, 'not only provides a connection to the past, but [also] creates the small town atmosphere in a near perfect [1940s] environment, a move which indicates the Cain inspiration where everyday people find themselves astray from normality.' [400] Doom demonstrates how the locale links the film to the past, and also to the hard-boiled world created by Cain. However, the film's aesthetic design also conjures up the past, and connects it to *Shadow of a Doubt*. The film, which also happened to be Hitchcock's own 'personal [favourite]',[401] was shot on black-and-white film stock. 'One of Hitchcock's first American films',[402] *Shadow of a Doubt* feels unlike the director's earlier works, with David Sterritt citing the example of the 'more lilting than one might expect' credit sequence.[403] The tone and tension of Hitchcock's film is mirrored in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, not least because of its visual style. Due to the modern-day expense of monochrome film stock, the Coen brothers shot in colour, before re-grading the print to black-and-white in post-production.[404] By this means, the 'luminous black-and-white [cinematography]' of Deakins captures the feel and style of classic noir. [405]

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[398] Doom, p. 111.
[399] Robson, p. 275.
[400] Doom, p. 112.
[401] Rowell, p. 290.
[402] Paul Gordon, *Dial "M" for Mother: A Freudian Hitchcock* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008), p. 37.
[403] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 52.
[404] Rowell, p. 306.
[405] Pulver, 'Pictures That Do The Talking', p. 152

There are other visual aspects which link the two films, apparent (as with the shared aesthetic between *The Big Lebowski* and *North by Northwest*) in the architecture of a house. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the Newton family home is often seen in its entirety, Hitchcock providing an establishing shot when the action relocates to the house. The building itself is a typical two-floor family residence, with steps leading up to a front porch.[406]

Figure 74 - Screenshot from *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943)

A similar looking house is evident in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, although it is not Ed's own property. Instead it is the family home of his friend Walter Abundas (Richard Jenkins), Birdy's father. Like Hitchcock's presentation of the Newton home, the Abundas residence is also a two-storey villa with a raised porch and entrance.[407]

[406] *Shadow of a Doubt*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Universal Pictures, 1943).
[407] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Figure 75 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

Admittedly, the similar architecture is to be expected, after all, the film is set in the same time and place as *Shadow of a Doubt*. Whilst notable, this instance should perhaps not be used solely to demonstrate the connection between the two films. However, a deeper reading of the house's significance in *The Man Who Wasn't There* offers further insight.

The Newton house is a central location in *Shadow of a Doubt*, but the Abundas home does not feature in *The Man Who Wasn't There* until after the crucial plot development of Big Dave's murder and Doris' subsequent arrest. It only appears when Ed arrives to seek succour from his friend Walter. It is the place where Ed frequently encounters Birdy, and as the film progresses, the barber is often seen there, losing himself in the youngster's piano playing.[408] For Ed, the house represents an escape from his unfulfilling life and a possible new life with Birdy and her music. It is his refuge, and its visual similarity to the residence in *Shadow of a Doubt* indicates that, like their main character, the Coen brothers are also using the house as a means of escape into the past which they are trying to capture. In this case they are seeking refuge in Hitchcock's shadow, recalling a director they admire through a subtle visual reference to one of their favourite films.

[408] Ibid.

Therefore, the Coen brothers' aesthetic choice to release the film in black-and-white couples together with the purposeful setting of their story in Santa Rosa and the associated visuals, creating a palpable connection between *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *Shadow of a Doubt*.

The aesthetic similarity between the houses also allows the Coen brothers to recreate a minor incident from *Shadow of a Doubt*. In the Hitchcock film, Joseph Newton (Henry Travers), the patriarch of the family, has a morbid fascination with murder. He and family friend Herbert Hawkins (Hume Cronyn) routinely sit on the porch and discuss how to commit the perfect murder, 'blissfully unaware [that] a murderer may be living under their roof.'[409] Dallas King argues that these dialogues provide one of the first instances of Hitchcock's 'carefully deployed black humour'.[410] Replicating this twice, *The Man Who Wasn't There* firstly sees Ed smoking on his own porch following a dinner party, musing through voiceover about his suspicions over Doris' affair. Just as he decides that he will not act on it, Big Dave joins Ed outside, creating an awkward ambience. Exemplifying the completely opposite spirit to that offered in the porch scenes in *Shadow of a Doubt*, this scene features Big Dave complementing Doris, and confirming his plans to promote her, seemingly fitting with Ed's assertion that there is something going on between them, before he even throws in a masked insult about the barber's dress sense. Yet, the second instance where *The Man Who Wasn't There* recalls the conversations of *Shadow of a Doubt* sees the Coen brothers replicate the atmosphere of the earlier Hitchcock scene much more closely.

This scene occurs when Ed arrives at the Abundas house seeking legal advice from an inebriated Walter on the latter's front porch. There is a streak of gallows humour, reminiscent of so many Hitchcock films, running throughout this scene as Walter's fear of the situation with Doris' upcoming trial and his own ineptitude for high-profile legal work, 'I'd be absolutely worthless [with] something like this,' couples together with the audience's knowledge that Ed is the guilty party, creating a humorous, if slightly odd, atmosphere.[411] Ed's emotionless demeanour

[409] Dallas King, 'My favourite Hitchcock: *Shadow of a Doubt*', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 15th August 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/aug/15/my-favourite-hitchcock-shadow-of-doubt [date accessed: 11th June 2015].
[410] Ibid.
[411] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

in the face of getting away with murder is played against Walter's shock and inability to grasp the situation, capturing a porch conversation which, although not 'slavishly' imitating the macabre comedy of *Shadow of a Doubt*, certainly sees the Coen brothers capture the essence of Hitchcock's black humour for their own means.

The connection between the two films also presents itself by way of another shared, and equally subtle, plot development which occurs at roughly the halfway point of both films, whereby the guilty parties confirm their crimes. As the events of *Shadow of a Doubt* unfold, Young Charlie (Teresa Wright) begins to suspect that her Uncle Charlie (Cotten) may well be the serial killer known as the 'Merry Widow Murderer'. Jack Graham (Macdonald Carey), a private detective, arrives in Santa Rosa on the trail of the fugitive, and he warns Charlie that her uncle is one of two suspects. Graham's insistence drives Charlie to investigate her uncle's odd behaviour, and her suspicions are confirmed during a family dinner. The Newton family gather around the table, but suspense builds as Young Charlie cryptically hints at the truth. Much to her shock, Uncle Charlie freely starts discussing wealthy widows. After initially framing the youngster's reaction, the camera cuts to a profile of Uncle Charlie, slowly moving into an extreme close-up shot as he muses about these 'silly' widows: 'And what do the wives do, these useless women? You see them in the hotels, the best hotels, every day by the thousands. Drinking the money, eating the money, losing the money at bridge, playing all day and all night. Smelling of money. Proud of their jewellery but of nothing else. Horrible, faded, fat, greedy women.' Then without cutting the shot, maintaining the tension and unease, Young Charlie interrupts with the defence that the widows are 'alive, they're human beings.' Then, seemingly confirming his guilt, Uncle Charlie, still in extreme close-up, turns and stares directly into the camera, asking 'Are they? Are they Charlie?', before the camera returns to a wider shot of the table.[412]

[412] *Shadow of a Doubt*.

Figure 76 - Screenshot from *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943)

In this scene, it is the shot of Young Charlie's reaction which shows her awareness of her uncle's guilt, and in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, the Coen brothers employ a similar moment when Doris works out that Ed is the guilty party.

Following her arrest for his murder, Doris confides in Ed that she has no idea about Big Dave's demise. However, during the initial meeting with her lawyer, she realises that Ed is the real killer. As Riedenschneider rubbishes Doris' account of what happened - 'It stinks' - he recaps the case and outlines the seemingly hopeless situation Doris is in. At this moment, racked by his own guilt, Ed confesses to the crime. Yet, despite this, Riedenschneider refuses to see this as anything except a husband trying to take the fall for his wife and fobs him off, leaving with the order to 'Forget the jealous husband thing, that's just silly.'[413] Riedenschneider may not realise that Ed's story is the truth, but Doris does. As he confesses, her gaze, which had been fixed ahead, shifts to her husband and does not leave him, lingering even as Riedenschneider rubbishes the story. Doris pieces together the information and comes to the realisation that her husband did commit the murder. Clearly this moment uses the family dinner scene from *Shadow of a Doubt* as its inspiration. However, during this scene, the Coen brothers choose to

[413] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

film it in a different manner. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, after capturing the moment of Young Charlie's realisation, Hitchcock kept the camera on Uncle Charlie, slowly dollying into an extreme close-up shot where the fourth wall is virtually broken. In *The Man Who Wasn't There* though, the Coen brothers employ a stationary camera, capturing in close-up the moment of Doris' comprehension of Ed's guilt, implying that he is not speaking to the lawyer, but is confessing to his wife. Indeed, the only movement in this scene comes when the camera follows Riedenschneider around the room, so that Doris' knowing eyes remain on Ed from the initial close-up, through a medium shot from behind Ed's shoulder, even during a long shot from the back of the room.[414]

Figure 77 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

[414] Ibid.

Figure 78 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

Indeed, Doris' unflinching eye line creates the same sense of knowing tension which Hitchcock created. All the while using the scene from the earlier film as a source of inspiration, the Coen brothers have altered the design of it to create their own scene. One which strangely makes the viewer feel sympathy for Doris at this moment where she learns the truth but stays quiet (protecting Ed?), even though she has acted monstrously up until this point.

Just as *The Man Who Wasn't There* shifted the balance of the Cain love triangle though, it also alters the fate of the party who comprehends the guilt of the offender. In the Hitchcock film, following her discovery, Young Charlie begins a quest against the uncle she once adored. In his attempt to escape justice, however, Uncle Charlie attempts to kill his niece. When his plan fails, he flees on a train, but Young Charlie boards it to stop him. Showing his true colours, Uncle Charlie manoeuvres to throw his niece from the moving train, but his plan backfires, and in the ensuing struggle it is he who falls and is hit by a passing train.[415] In this instance, the person who realises the truth (Young Charlie) survives, brings the

[415] *Shadow of a Doubt*.

guilty party to justice (Uncle Charlie's death) and is given a happy ending (a future with Graham).

In *The Man Who Wasn't There* though, this situation is skewed (indirectly remediated) to favour the guilty party, Ed. After realising that her husband killed her lover, Doris, acting as the antithesis of Hitchcock's heroine, does not set out to bring Ed to justice, or to clear her name. Instead, she stays quiet, patiently awaiting her court date, before eventually committing suicide in prison, ensuring that Ed walks away.[416] The fact that he is later brought to justice for a crime he had nothing to do with does not change the outcome. Doris is innocent, but even though she is aware of the true culprit, her silence and subsequent death ensures that, unlike in *Shadow of a Doubt*, justice does not necessarily prevail. Therefore, *The Man Who Wasn't There* again demonstrates that the Coen brothers' style of remediation allows them to alter their sources in a way which honours them whilst also ensuring their own postmodern originality.

The final connection between the two films comes in the form of the characterisation of their young female protagonists. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, Young Charlie is the antithesis of the murderous Charlie. Whilst her uncle is evil and manipulative, even conspiring to kill her, Young Charlie can be described as a 'wholesome young woman',[417] with Sterritt noting that she 'is ostensibly innocent and even virtuous.'[418] As the heroine of the film, Young Charlie's innocence counterpoints the dark tone, and the same is true, to an extent, in relation to the character of Birdy in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. In contrast to Ed's emotionless manoeuvrings following Big Dave's murder and the death of his wife, Birdy is a young girl, occupied with playing music. Like Young Charlie, Birdy too could be described as a wholesome, perhaps even innocent, youngster; that is until she offers to fellate Ed in his car. However, just as Young Charlie leads to the downfall of her uncle in *Shadow of a Doubt*, Birdy's unwanted sexual advance brings about Ed's. It is after regaining consciousness following the car crash brought on by Birdy's actions that he is arrested for the murder of Tolliver.[419] It was shown above

[416] *The Man Who Wasn't* There.
[417] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 71.
[418] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p. 59.
[419] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

that Birdy was a representation of Lola from *Double Indemnity*, but when viewing *The Man Who Wasn't There* in the context of its connections to *Shadow of a Doubt*, it becomes obvious that Birdy is also a version of Hitchcock's Young Charlie, albeit with a sexual side to her character attributable to contemporary sensibilities and Johansson's own star persona.

Shadow of a Doubt is clearly remediated in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. There are both obvious and more subtle similarities between the two films. It comes as little surprise then, that critics like McKenna have asserted that due to its style and setting, *The Man Who Wasn't There* functions as the Coen brothers' tribute to both Hitchcock and Cain, both of whom 'inspired' various aspects of the film.[420] This, however, overlooks the full scope of the Coen brothers' remediative filmmaking. Cain and Hitchcock may inspire parts of the film, but they are by no means the only influences remediated in *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Abide with Me

The ending of *The Man Who Wasn't There* details Ed's final moments on death row. After his arrest, Ed's narration describes how 'A kid diving in a waterhole outside of town had found [Tolliver's] car. They winched it out and found he had been beaten, just like Big Dave said. Beaten to death.' This description is visually matched on screen, as a young boy is seen swimming in cloudy water, and as he dives deeper, a figure begins to appear below him. The water gradually becomes clearer, revealing the dead body of Tolliver seemingly floating on the river bed.[421]

[420] McKenna, p. 164.
[421] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Figure 79 - Screenshot from *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001)

The murky visibility of this shot, together with the obviously dead figure, creates a ghostly effect. As well as giving the closing scene an unsettling and macabre atmosphere, however, the underwater 'reveal' of Tolliver's body also directly recalls *The Night of the Hunter*. This film is routinely remediated in the work of the Coen brothers. In *The Big Lebowski*, for instance, the Stranger closes the film by breaking the fourth wall, stating that 'The Dude abides. I don't know about you, but I take comfort in that. It's good knowin' he's out there. The Dude. Takin' 'er easy for all us sinners.'[422] This concluding narration offers a reworking of the last lines delivered by Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish) in Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter*, where she asserts, 'Lord save little children! The wind blows and the rains are cold. Yet, they abide... They abide and they endure.'[423] Reinforcing the similarities between these two sections of dialogue, Jones summarises that, 'At the conclusion of *The Big Lebowski*, [the Stranger] says he takes comfort in the fact that the Dude "abides" – that is, he endures without yielding.'[424]

[422] *The Big Lebowski*.
[423] *The Night of the Hunter*, dir. by Charles Laughton (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1955).
[424] Jones, p. 10.

The discovery of Tolliver's body in *The Man Who Wasn't There* can also be remediatively traced back to the earlier film. In *The Night of the Hunter*, Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum), who is routinely referred to as 'Preacher', marries recent widow Willa Harper (Shelley Winters). She does not know that Powell is a serial killer and that, having shared a prison cell with her late bank-robbing husband, he is looking for the stolen money which is hidden with her family. After Willa uncovers the truth, Powell murders her so he can continue his search. In a later scene, when Birdie Steptoe (James Gleason) goes fishing, we discover what Powell has done with Willa's body. Slowly panning from right to left along the bottom of a lake, the camera first captures reeds pulled by the water before finishing on a motionless Willa, whose hair resembles the floating of the reeds. A couple of cuts frame the scene from other angles, emphasising the horror of this 'reveal', before Birdie's fishing hook bobs down to Willa's watery grave. The camera then assumes the man's point-of-view, showing the body through the filter of the water before finally finishing on Birdie's reaction to his heart-breaking discovery.[425]

Figure 80 - Screenshot from *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

Similarly, Tolliver is also found in his car at the bottom of a body of water, and despite being in vehicles, both bodies somehow still appear to be floating in a

[425] *The Night of the Hunter*.

fashion which adds to the eeriness of the situation. Although Willa's body is viewed before Birdie (whose name is perhaps also a source of inspiration for the Coen brothers' Birdy) spots it, the opposite dynamic to *The Man Who Wasn't There* where the audience see Tolliver's corpse at the same time as the unfortunate swimmer, it is beyond doubt that *The Night of the Hunter* influenced the Coen brothers, and, like Cain and Hitchcock, it is a source of remediation for *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

The Truth is Out There

This is also true in relation to the remediation of other film genres. As was previously highlighted, Doom views *The Man Who Wasn't There* as the Coen brothers' 'ultimate tribute' to film noir. However, although the film's 'black and white tale of [...] the bizarre' certainly conforms with the legacy of film noir,[426] it is not the only visual style or film genre which helped shape it. Throughout the film a recurring motif is evident in the presence of aliens and UFOs. The Coen brothers have admitted that the inclusion of otherworldly images was a conscious stylistic choice, with Joel confirming that: 'With this one, we were thinking noir to a certain extent, but we were [also] thinking about science fiction movies from the early [1950s]. You know, the flying saucers and the pod people.'[427] This first manifests itself at the midway point. Following Big Dave's murder and Doris' arrest, Ed lies awake at night. Answering a knock at the door, he is confronted by Ann Nirdlinger (Katherine Borowitz), Big Dave's widow. Dressed in typical mourning attire, and with an unsettling wide-eyed gaze (she does not blink during the entire scene), Ann's appearance appears close to some form of classic femme fatale, and it seems inevitable that when she announces, 'I know... Don't worry Ed. I came to tell you, and you should tell Doris', she has figured out the truth of Ed's involvement in the murder. However, in a complete divergence from the viewer's expectations, she takes a paranoid look over her shoulder, allowing the camera to reposition to a close-up, and divulges what she believes to be the truth:

> We went camping last summer [...] At night, there were lights. We both saw them. We never told anyone, outside of our official report. Our report to the government [...] There was a spacecraft. I saw the

[426] Doom, p. 111.
[427] George M. Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 195.

> creatures. They led Big Dave onto the craft. He never told anyone what they did [...] I cannot repeat it to you. But this thing goes deep, Ed. It goes deep, and involves the government. This was not your wife. There is a great deal of fear. You know how certain circles would find it - the knowledge - a threat. They, they'd try to limit it, and [...] Sometimes knowledge is a curse, Ed. After this happened, things changed. Big Dave... he never touched me again [...] Tell Doris not to worry. I know it wasn't her. Perhaps this will bring it out, finally. Perhaps now it will all come out.[428]

Following this unbelievable conspiracy theory, Ann, relieved to have divulged her 'truth', smiles and walks off, leaving Ed standing in bewilderment at the door. Whilst this scene appears to be little more than a humorous aside, highlighting that no one could suspect or believe that Ed is the guilty party, it also recreates the paranoia and conspiracy of the 1950s alien invasion features which the Coen brothers cite as an inspiration. Whilst this raises the suspicion that, with her unsettling appearance, demeanour, and dialogue, Ann could well be one of the pod people that Joel specifically mentioned, it also suggests a deeper remediative meaning. The 1950s science fiction films cited as influences were often parables about the 'threat' of a Communist takeover of Hollywood and the ensuing 'witch-hunts'. Although this will be addressed in greater detail in chapter seven, as *Hail, Caesar!* sees them recreate these issues in a more overt manner than here, it is telling that in a hard-boiled noir film, they are also evoking this political paranoia and in turn remediating and hypermediatively connecting to a large part of Hollywood history.

In the wake of Ann's 'reveal', the alien imagery becomes prevalent. One example comes after Doris' suicide, when, sitting in the barber shop reading *Life* magazine, Ed flicks to an article entitled 'The Mysteries of Roswell, New Mexico'. As the camera, adopting Ed's point-of-view, scans the piece, it stops and focuses on the two accompanying pictures, an impression of the aliens' visit and a drawing of the UFO.[429] Ann's strange visit has left Ed aware of aliens, and in turn this alters the rest of the story, for at the end of the film, a UFO appears to Ed in the prison on the night before his execution. Approaching this with the same nonchalance which defines his existence, hinting that he is imagining this event, Ed wanders out of his open cell and down to the yard when he sees a bright light. Outside he is

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[428] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.
[429] Ibid.

confronted by a UFO which bears an unmistakeable likeness to the ship featured in the magazine. With the UFO hovering above, the camera cuts to Ed's nonplussed expression as an alien sound heralds the craft's exit. Neither curious, nor using the opportunity he has been given to escape, Ed laconically nods his head and returns to await impending death.[430] From the moment of Ann's disclosure about extra-terrestrials, the film noir 'vibe' of *The Man Who Wasn't There* has become fused with, if not entirely replaced by, alien imagery in the style of 1950s science fiction films.

These examples show that, whilst Doom is correct in labelling *The Man Who Wasn't There* as the Coen brothers' 'ultimate tribute' to film noir, the bizarreness which he attributes to the film stems from the influence of 1950s science fiction. This means that *The Man Who Wasn't There* represents an amalgamation of genres and styles, not just a series of individual remediations. However, for Wilson, the Coen brothers' mixing of film noir and science fiction was never in question stylistically, just their motivation. He asserts that, 'No doubt they *were* thinking of both genres, but the [filmmakers] don't explain why these two lines of "thought" have been joined together in their film.'[431]

This is a purely creative decision which not only (re)captures a certain wave of paranoia and in turn echoes both political and Hollywood history, but also confirms that this film is no mere imitation of any work, it is an original remediative product. By intertwining their-Cain inspired crime story with science fiction imagery, the Coen brothers have crafted a mixture which would not be welcomed by the hard-boiled writer himself. In his essay dealing with existentialism and transcendence in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, Tom Martin notes that Cain's 'pulp style is a Coen inspiration, though [he could] never [have] imagined crime fiction that included a musical montage on haircuts and an alien visitation. [Yet] [s]omehow, with the Coens, it all fits.'[432] Martin ends his analysis by asserting that the odd mixture of imagery does not seem out of place in the world created by the Coen brothers, but the argument overlooks an important factor. Film noir, so

[430] Ibid.
[431] Wilson, p. 195.
[432] Tom Martin, 'Pursuits of Transcendence in *The Man Who Wasn't There*', in *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartren Perspective*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Boule and Enda McCaffrey (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 63-78 (p. 63).

closely associated with the crime fiction penned by Cain and his contemporaries, often placed its protagonists outside conventional society and offered commentaries on the 'norms'. As Wilson puts it, 'It [was] a commonplace of *film noirs* from the 1940s and 50s that their protagonists [were] seriously "alienated" either from their own emotional lives, from the social contexts in which they live, or from both.' [433] In a remediative acknowledgement of this trope then, the otherworldly imagery contained within *The Man Who Wasn't There* is representative of this form of social displacement. The Coen brothers take 'the motif of "invasion from outer space"',[434] and use it as a visual metaphor for their own protagonist's alienation, at the same time conforming both to the sense of alienation from classic film noir, and to the actual alien imagery of 1950s science fiction films. The Coen brothers have mixed elements from both frames of reference and fitted the result to their own story through a creative style of remediation.

This view of the UFOs representing Ed's alienation is supported by Karen Hoffman. Once again linking the science fiction imagery with the film noir theme of alienation, Hoffman comments that

> Although the Coen brothers themselves don't explain the significance of the ubiquity of aliens and UFOs in Ed's story, a case can be made for thinking that these were important to include not only because of their connection to other noir films but also because they are representations of otherworldly things. In a film in which the main character is withdrawn from the world [...] it seems somewhat fitting to incorporate images of entities that are also not at home in this world.[435]

Indeed, both Hoffman and Wilson provide compelling arguments suggesting that the inclusion of 1950s science fiction film motifs is part of a visual metaphor for Ed's social standing and psychological condition. However, both also highlight that the Coen brothers have never confirmed exactly what their alien imagery represents, suggesting that there could be another explanation.

The linking of the aliens to Ed's own personal alienation makes sense, but this also overlooks the fact that *The Man Who Wasn't There* is the Coen brothers'

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[433] Wilson, p. 196.
[434] Ibid., p. 195.
[435] Karen D. Hoffman, 'Being the Barber: Kierkegaardian Despair in *The Man Who Wasn't There*', in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 243-266 (p. 255).

version of a Cain crime story. Logic takes a backseat as the film sees the barber get away with his wife's lover's murder, only to have her commit suicide and have himself convicted for a murder carried out by the lover. Hoffman and Wilson make compelling arguments linking the otherworldly imagery back to the classic noir trait of alienation. However, it may be that critics are trying to uncover the meaning of another seemingly indeterminate Coen brothers' symbol. This is supported through the film's final scene, which sees Ed awaiting his execution on death row. He has sold the story of how he got there to a 'men's magazine', and it is here that it becomes clear that the voiceover heard throughout the film has in fact been Ed retelling the story through flashback whilst sitting in his cell; the flashback narration being a device inherently linked with classic noir. This revelation calls into question every element of the film, as Ed may not be the most reliable, or impartial, narrator, and as if emphasising this, during this scene, he even informs his readers (and the audience) that the magazine are 'paying me five cents a word, so you'll pardon me if sometimes I've told you more than you wanted to know.'[436]

This immediately precedes Ed's encounter with the UFO in the prison yard, suggesting that the film's continued alien imagery may ultimately be insignificant. As Ed is being paid per word, and has admitted that he has told the audience 'more than [they need] to know', it becomes likely that every instance of otherworldly imagery in his story has simply been filler material used to push up the word count, and therefore, his payment. This thinking, although unsatisfying for those who have attempted to decipher the meaning of the film's alien imagery, certainly fits with the Coen brothers' history of including inscrutable imagery. The recurring imagery of a disembodied, blowing hat in *Miller's Crossing* became a source of much speculation, despite the siblings' own claims that 'the hat doesn't "represent" anything. It's just a hat blown by the wind.'[437] By following this 'logic', it seems plausible that the alien imagery in *The Man Who Wasn't There* also has no hidden meaning. Perhaps it is not a visual representation of Ed's social alienation or a manifestation of his paranoia following his crime; if a hat is just a hat, maybe a UFO is just a UFO. It could be that the aliens were only ever included so that the Coen brothers could remediate the 1950s science fiction films they admire, using the

[436] *The Man Who Wasn't There*.
[437] Coursodon, p. 44.

intricacies of remediation to take the alien imagery of 1950s science fiction and making it the MacGuffin of *The Man Who Wasn't There*, just as the hat functioned as the MacGuffin in *Miller's Crossing*.

The Man Who Wasn't There completes the Coen brothers' cycle of hard-boiled-inspired films. However, this seems to be misleading, as like their earlier films, it is not just a remediation of Cain's fiction. Instead, it continues their use of Hitchcock's body of work, remediating *Shadow of a Doubt*. Alongside these sources, *The Man Who Wasn't There* also features direct and indirect remediations of *The Night of the Hunter*, and a mystifying remediation of 1950s science fiction. Creating a film which is not an adaptation or imitation of Cain or any of these other influences, but rather an amalgamative remediation. This is a distinction which becomes even more important when considering those Coen brothers films which, on the surface, appear to be direct adaptations.

Chapter Five - No Country for Straight Adaptation: The Remediation of Dickey and McCarthy

Since the release of *The Man Who Wasn't There* the Coen brothers have arguably become more straightforward adapters. This change in approach, however, does not mean that their films no longer employ creative remediation. Instead, the Coen brothers can now be identified as remediative adapters, whose translations of existing sources are never just simple adaptations, but rather constitute amalgamative remediations of various influences, besides the adapted text. This chapter will address this process by examining the Coen brothers' approach to adapting McCarthy in *No Country for Old Men*. This analysis forms the bulk of this chapter, addressing their film version of the novel, however, it also necessitates an evaluation of *Fargo*. Their earlier film has some striking connections with their McCarthy adaptation, as does their first outright adaptation, *To the White Sea*. As I shall show, their unfilmed screenplay of Dickey's novel represents a forerunner, not only of *No Country for Old Men*, but also of their movement into more nuanced levels of remediation as a model of adaptation, yet it is often overlooked entirely in evaluations of the Coen brothers' oeuvre. With both projects possessing similar levels of intensity and tension, featuring moments of near-silent action and focusing on psychopathic central characters, the connections are obvious. Given the importance *To the White Sea* seems to have in terms of the second 'phase' of their career then, this chapter begins with a detailed examination of this project.

Following the completion of their remediative treatment of American Detective fiction with *The Man Who Wasn't There*, the Coen brothers were set to direct *To the White Sea*. Scripted by the siblings themselves from Dickey's 1993 novel, the film was in pre-production for a winter 2001 shoot whilst *The Man Who Wasn't There* was in competition at Cannes.[438] Levine describes it as a story about an American B-29 'gunner named Muldrow shot down while on a bombing mission over Tokyo. Formerly an Alaskan hunter, Muldrow must use his survival skills to stay alive.'[439] With Brad Pitt set to star as Muldrow, everything suggests that *To the White Sea* would have represented a watershed moment in their filmmaking

[438] Smriti Mundhra, 'Interview with Joel Coen', in *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp. 188-193 (p. 191).
[439] Levine, p. 161.

career. Both visually and tonally more ambitious than any of their previous films, the project was a major departure from their trademark style, 'without any jokes [in the screenplay] at all.'[440] It also represented the first time that they had gone down the route of more conventional, straight adaptation. Moreover, the script called for stylised shots of wartime Tokyo, as well as shooting at other locations, and aside from the first few minutes was 'a virtual silent film'.[441] Yet, despite greenlighting the project with a reported $60 million budget, 20th Century Fox had concerns over the screenplay's lack of dialogue, and 'apparently baulked at the Coens' decision to film on location in Hokkaido.'[442] Even though the budget represented the biggest of their careers, the brothers still felt constrained, with Joel admitting that 'the film required more money than what the studio was willing to put forth.'[443] Most reports put the project's demise down to financial matters, with Doom succinctly noting that it 'died due to budget concerns.'[444]

This, however, did not mark the first occasion the source material had been treated for the screen. Dickey's novel had previously formed the basis of another unfilmed screenplay by David Peoples, the screenwriter behind *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Unforgiven* (1992). With a first draft dated July 12th 1996, Peoples' adaptation, co-written with his wife Janet for Universal Studios, offers an interpretation of *To the White Sea* vastly different to that of the Coen brothers. In his summary of the project, Robson implies that the Coen brothers were working their adaptation through the existing screenplay, as it 'was originated not by Joel and Ethan but by the husband-and-wife writing team of David and Janet Peoples.'[445] However, whilst the Coen brothers' script is dated August 13th 1998, a full two years after the Peoples' effort, perhaps implying awareness and even familiarity with the earlier adaptation, nothing in the script itself suggests that the first screenplay had any impact on the Coen brothers. The process of adapting a novel through the filter of an existing screenplay would inherently generate a level of remediation, however, the Coen brothers' adaptation of *To the White Sea* offers

[440] Robson, p. 284.
[441] Doom, p. 136.
[442] Pulver, p. 155.
[443] Mundhra, p. 191.
[444] Doom, p. 136.
[445] Robson, pp. 284-285.

a more complex range of influences than Robson gives it credit for in his summation.

The fact that the Peoples' screenplay did not influence the Coen brothers' adaptation is clear from the outset. In the Peoples' script, the film would have opened on the snowy Alaskan tundra of Muldrow's youth. This flashback would then have heralded in the titles, which would have continued as Muldrow delivered a voiceover explaining that he is 'a voice in the wind'. A further three paragraphs of detail about shots of the frozen landscape follow, before 'the sound of the COLONEL addressing his troops, even as TITLES CONTINUE over the snowscape'. The Colonel's voiceover would then act as a sound bridge, transferring the action to the American Air Force base on Tinian Island, where the camera fixes on Muldrow, now in his twenties. Cutting between Muldrow and his Colonel whilst the latter eulogises about white phosphorus and napalm, the action finally cross cuts back to Alaska for the conclusion of the titles.[446]

As the screenplay continues, the focus seems to shift to the Redhead, a new recruit to Muldrow's aircraft, as he asks the officers their impressions of the Alaskan gunner. Merely implied in Dickey's novel, the Peoples have seemingly invented this moment to deliver extra dialogue, because the exposition here adds nothing that has not, or will not, be explored as the script unfolds. The scene then cuts to later that day as Muldrow inspects his equipment for the upcoming mission. In another fabrication solely designed to increase the duration of the scenes at the base, the Redhead begins a conversation with Muldrow, at the end of which the protagonist closes his eyes. This cues a further intercut as we flash back to Alaska, and a second instance of Muldrow's voiceover. The action then finally shifts back to Tinian Island as the Redhead and fellow recruit Arlen speak with Muldrow, the only one of these three interactions represented in the novel.[447]

What encompasses a detailed twelve pages of the Peoples' screenplay unfolds in just six pages of Dickey's novel, and the same minimalist clarity practiced by the author is also employed in the Coen brothers' adaptation, arguably to an even greater extent. With no imagery specific to the Alaskan tundra, the later script

[446] David Peoples and Janet Peoples, 'To the White Sea – Screenplay by David Peoples & Janet Peoples', Film Script, July 12th 1996, pp. 1-4.
[447] Ibid, pp. 4-12.

instead describes a very cinematic opening, full of varied cuts and shot lengths, as the Colonel gives a shortened version of his white phosphorus speech. When he finishes, the Coen brothers do not cut to Alaska or another scene, instead they stay in the aircraft hangar as 'the cacophony of voices fades away to leave, once again the sound of wind.' Then an unidentified younger voice begins telling the audience about the 'voice in the wind.' Nothing suggests that this voice belongs to Muldrow, unlike in the Peoples' script, and this is significant, because the mystery of its identity is only clarified at the end of the Coen brothers' screenplay. There is then a montage-like procession of images as Muldrow carries out his pre-flight ritual. When this series of images fades to black, the action shifts to the encounter with the Redhead and Arlen.[448] The Coen brothers cover in four pages what the Peoples' script does in twelve. They even cut out some of the Colonel's speech from the novel. This highlights how the Coen brothers' version of *To the White Sea* is, contrary to Robson's claim, their own adaptation of Dickey's novel, and not influenced by the earlier adaptation.

Indeed, the Coen brothers' script is much more cinematic then the Peoples'. For example, in the 1996 adaptation, Muldrow's voiceover often triggers a flashback to his childhood on the Brooks Range in Alaska, which informs the viewer of his survival skills. Dickey's novel is told exclusively through Muldrow's first-person narration, so the Peoples' selective use of voiceover during the flashbacks represents a filmic compromise. Instead of relying on Muldrow to narrate, the Peoples chose only to employ the voiceover for one type of scene, a selective way of remaining faithful to the source material. Conversely, the Coen brothers eliminate the construct of Muldrow's narration. He drives the action and is still the screenplay's focal point, but aside from the opening disembodied 'voice in the wind' and his final closing of the story, there are few instances of voiceover. They opt instead to allow the character's actions and the images to drive the story, removing the necessity for any narration, and therefore creating a different vision of *To the White Sea*.

As noted above. the Coen brothers' script offered a more cinematic take on the source material than the previous adaptation. In some instances, the visual flair

[448] Coen and Coen, pp.1-4.

afforded by cinema, as opposed to the literary medium of Dickey's novel, also leads to scenes solely attributable to the Coen brothers themselves. After Muldrow's plane is shot down above Tokyo in the first act, killing the rest of the crew, and after he escapes the city, he comes across a stream where he can fish. Towards the end of this passage, the airman becomes 'suddenly alert at a noise.'[449] However, rather than a threat, the 'rustling' comes from a stray dog. More sentimental screenwriters would use this development to change the lone wolf dynamic of *To the White Sea* into a friendship between man and animal, at least to momentarily break the increasingly sombre tone. Illustrating how focused their adaptation is though, the Coen brothers have Muldrow toss the remnants of his dinner to the dog, and hail the animal over to him, before it exits on the same page of the script on which it entered.[450]

[449] Ibid., p. 42.
[450] Ibid, p. 42.

He is suddenly alert at a noise.

It is a rustling from the brush; a clinking sound accompanies it.

After a moment a dog emerges. It is very gaunt, its ribs visible. It advances hesitantly towards Muldrow, head ducked below its shoulder in a submissive attitude.

Muldrow tosses the fish head over to where the entrails lie, near the dog. The dog sniffs at the head, sniffs at the entrails. After a couple of tentative, feinting bites, it picks up the stomach in its teeth, brings it deeper with a jerk of the head, chews, swallows. It laps up the heart, chews, swallows, tail wagging.

Muldrow

Here, dog.

The dog advances again, its movement still accompanied by the metallic clinking sound. As it reaches him, Muldrow gives it a pat too reassure it, then reaches under its neck to feel.

It has a collar. The source of the clinking is a couple of tags, which Muldrow examines.

The little metal discs are engraved with Japanese characters.

Muldrow lets them drop.

The dog goes back to the entrails.

It picks up the head and trots away with it, downriver, tail wagging.

Figure 81 - Excerpt from Unfilmed Screenplay of *To the White Sea* (1998)

Injecting a single line of dialogue and brief contact with another living being into the sparse story may seem like the obvious motive behind this moment, which has no counterpart in Dickey's novel, but there may be a more relevant explanation. The Coen brothers have routinely featured animal exploits in their films. In *Miller's Crossing* for example, it is with his dog that a young boy discovers the body of 'Rug' Daniels with the missing toupee.[451] This use of a canine seems to correspond directly to the stray dog of *To the White Sea*, however, the Coen brothers usually feature animal-human interactions through the form of a similar ginger cat. Extending screen time beyond the merely incidental dog in *Miller's Crossing*, Pickles, the moggy from *The Ladykillers*, takes on a remediative role by recalling the limb-stealing dog from Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*. As observed by Rowell, Pickles

[451] *Miller's Crossing*.

performs a similar function as the dog in the earlier film who appears 'carrying a severed hand in his mouth.'[452] When Garth Pancake (J.K. Simmons) accidentally blows off his finger, the cat takes ownership of the digit, eventually closing the story when he disposes of it in the Mississippi River.[453] However, simply equating Pickles with the dog from *Yojimbo* is to overlook the intricate significances with which the Coen brothers imbue the animal. Pickles, like his elderly owner, always manages to outsmart the hapless gang, best exemplified by his pilfering of Pancake's digit. The Coen brothers created an intelligent animal in *The Ladykillers*, and it would appear the same is true in *To the White Sea*. Although just present for one page of the script, the stray dog comes in and, just as Pickles did with the troupe, seems to manipulate the otherwise cold Muldrow, getting exactly what he wants before exiting.

The kindness which Muldrow shows the canine in Japan is in stark contrast to an earlier piece of characterisation. After bailing out of his B-52 above Tokyo, he parachutes down as the view shifts to take the action back to Alaska in the script's first use of flashback. Here, a younger Muldrow is riding through the frozen landscape on a dog sled. Stranded in the wilderness after one of the sled's tethers breaks, the youngster loses his mittens, and cannot start a fire. Selecting 'the rearmost dog', Muldrow leads it out of sight of the others, subduing it before plunging 'the knife into the dog's throat.' He then slits the dying animal's belly before pushing 'his frozen hands' inside.[454] Contrasting the kindness shown by Muldrow to the dog later in the screenplay, and indeed the love for nature and animals he avows throughout *To the White Sea*, this brutal example highlights a trait which is crucial, not just to the character, but also to the film as a whole. By sacrificing one of his animals here, the Coen brothers establish both Muldrow's cool calculation and his ruthless instinct for survival. Refusing to succumb to inevitable frostbite, Muldrow inflicts the minimum damage on his pack, taking just one dog for the greater benefit. Like the other interaction with a dog described above, this scene too has been invented by the Coen brothers, as it has no equivalent in the novel, thus further informing their style of adaptation. A very striking scene, one of the most harrowing and memorable from the entire script, it

[452] Rowell, p. 352.
[453] *The Ladykillers*, dir. by Joel Coen (Touchstone Pictures, 2004).
[454] Coen and Coen, pp. 18-22.

manages to instil the key facets of Muldrow's character very early. His reasoning and determination to survive is continually reinforced in Dickey's novel over 300 pages, yet the Coen brothers encapsulate the same traits in just five pages of their adaptation, one flashback sufficiently making the point before the story moves on.

Muldrow's encounter with the hungry dog leads to another flashback, the instigation of which provides one of the best examples of just how visually powerful the Coen brothers' adaptation would have been. At night, after the dog has left, Muldrow peers out into nature and the sky, closing his eyes as though almost drifting in and out of consciousness. The script then details 'a long hold', immediately succeeded by one striking direction: 'WHITE'. Noted in the next line as a cut, following this transition from Japanese night 'The sound background drops out completely', leaving 'perfect quiet' as the screen remains white.[455]

He goes back to his spot and lies down and looks back up at the trees. He closes his eyes.

After a long hold:

WHITE

The sound background drops out completely at the cut. We are in perfect quiet, looking at a field of unbroken white.

We begin to hear a swishing sound, very faint, but growing. Footfalls, but not sharp ones.

At their loudest point a figure enters in the foreground. It is Muldrow, wearing snowshoes and carrying a long Inuit spear. He recedes into the background, defining the snow-covered ground by the tracks his snowshoes leave. Nothing else distinguishes ground from sky on this overcast day.

The sound of swishing footfalls recedes with Muldrow. We hold as he grows small.

Figure 82 - Excerpt from Unfilmed Screenplay of *To the White Sea* (1998)

This would transport the viewer back to Alaska with the younger Muldrow, the lack of sound and the stark colour change signposting the temporal and geographical shift. The only purpose of this short flashback is to highlight Muldrow's status as a

[455] Ibid., p. 43.

loner at one with nature, but it is the technical boldness that marks this passage out, serving to illustrate how cinematic their adaptations are.

The unfilmed screenplay is full of moments which, if filmed as described, would unmistakeably recall other sources which have inspired the Coen brothers from across various media. As was demonstrated above, *Miller's Crossing* introspectively remediated the earlier *Blood Simple* with a visual recollection, whilst the amalgamous nature of its score also foreshadowed the musical tone of *True Grit*. A similar balance between recalling their past works and anticipating their future films is also apparent in *To the White Sea*. Muldrow's odyssey through Japan sees him come across 'a large house', seemingly in the middle of nowhere. In Dickey's novel, it belongs to the owner of a rice plantation, giving context to its size, and increasing the tension as Muldrow risks being caught by the workers as the scene unfolds. The house is inhabited by an elderly blind man and his wife. Assuming the man's vulnerability will allow him to steal supplies, Muldrow slips in. Amid his rummaging, however, he is alarmed when he turns to discover that the blind man has left the room silently. A deadly game of cat and mouse ensues, as the old man demonstrates samurai skills, wielding a sword against Muldrow's knife in a near-silent battle throughout the house. Muldrow is cut during the fight, but exploiting his opponent's reliance on sound, the American pounces when a noise misdirects him, stabbing him in the neck. Perhaps out of taste, the Coen brothers do not show the implied murder of the wife. Instead, when she looks in on the carnage, the screenplay breaks, with the next direction indicating 'LATER'.[456]

No Country for Straight Adaptation

After scavenging the couple's possessions, Muldrow decides to destroy the evidence of his visit by starting a fire. Rather than showing the blaze rip through the interior though, the Coen brothers would have relocated the camera outside the house, showing that 'Muldrow is at the foot of the yard, walking toward us. Behind him flame is beginning to climb the front wall of the house.'[457] This moment is their invention, as in Dickey's novel Muldrow considers burning down the house before deciding against it.[458] On its own, the impact of a man walking away from

[456] Ibid., pp. 47-53.
[457] Ibid., pp. 53-55.
[458] James Dickey, *To the White Sea* (London: Scribner, 2002), pp. 206-211.

an intensifying fire makes for a striking visual, however, placing this description in the context of their future works only adds remediative value to this moment, as the bones of this scene would resurface in one of their later adaptations.

Six years after their version of *To the White Sea* was abandoned, the Coen brothers (with Ethan now credited as the co-director) released their adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*. Reading the unfilmed screenplay for *To the White Sea* alongside the Academy Award winner makes one realise that there are significant overlaps between the two projects. These will be explored in greater detail later, however, for now, it is important to note their shared intensity and tension building. Whilst both *To the White Sea* and *No Country for Old Men* demonstrate a tendency towards stretches of silent action, arguably the biggest similarity between the two is the focus on a seemingly psychopathic killer. Muldrow may be behind enemy lines, but the trail of bodies he leaves suggests his killing is down to more than simple war mentality, with flashbacks confirming that he has previously been a serial murderer, targeting young women. Whilst this raises legitimate social and political questions in relation to the issues of violence and war, as well as over the notion of 'sanctioned' killings whilst in service to your country, the similarity with *No Country for Old Men* is obvious. It has Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), a ruthless hitman who appears unstoppable, his quest as seemingly relentless as Muldrow's journey north. Yet, whilst *To the White Sea* is without doubt Muldrow's story, *No Country for Old Men* is nominally presented as that of Llewelyn Moss (Brolin), with Chigurh framed as his pursuer. The fact that Chigurh retains the focus of the narrative following Moss' off screen death suggests, however, that the Coen brothers also wish to align this adaptation with *To the White Sea*, by making it about the killer, in turn inspiring debate about crime and psychopathy.

Aside from tonal and thematic similarities, there are also scenes in *No Country for Old Men* which appear to have their basis in the earlier project, one example being a reproduction of the flaming imagery highlighted above. In a scene which closely mirrors the proposed one from *To the White Sea*, an injured Chigurh uses a fire as a diversion to obtain medical supplies from a pharmacy. In a script draft for *No Country for Old Men* (dated November 28th 2005), the description states that Chigurh will limp towards the camera, starting a fire using a parked car's fuel tank, before the camera relocates 'INSIDE THE PHARMACY', as an

unflinching Chigurh walks on from the explosion.[459] On paper, this shares a fleeting similarity to the events from *To the White Sea*, strongly suggesting that the unfilmed screenplay remained in the Coen brothers' minds while adapting *No Country for Old Men*, a supposition made even more credible given the scene's realisation on screen. Chigurh is framed limping towards the audience, with the camera placed behind his target car. The low-angled, soft focus shot is not detailed in the script, highlighting the nature of the transition from page to screen. Following this, the film cuts to inside the pharmacy. Initially presented in a long shot, the sequence gradually transitions to a medium one as Chigurh limps further inside, closer to the camera. All the while, deep focus is employed so that the flame burning in the car's filler cap is visible through the store front. When Chigurh is completely in the medium shot, the car explodes, creating a diversion as the other shoppers turn towards the source, allowing him to go behind the counter and steal the medical supplies he needs.[460]

Figure 83 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

[459] Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, 'No Country for Old Men – Adaptation by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen', Film Script, November 28th 2005, pp. 72-73.
[460] *No Country for Old Men*, dir. by Joel and Ethan Coen (Paramount Vantage, 2007).

Figure 84 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Figure 85 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

This moment also captures the description of Muldrow's walk towards the camera in *To the White Sea*, a similarity not fully evident in the script for *No Country for Old Men*. This scene is a clear remediation of the earlier adaptation, reinforcing the view that the Coen brothers' version of *To the White Sea* had a profound effect on them as filmmakers, remediatively shaping their McCarthy adaptation.

The screenplay for *To the White Sea* also details a lingering shot which would unmistakeably recall the earlier *Miller's Crossing*. After boarding a train transporting logs on page 56 of the script, Muldrow stows away in one of the open cars, lying back before gazing up. The described high-angle shot that details this action gives way to a P.O.V. shot, as Muldrow's 'point-of-view shows sky. Pointing towards it from either side are pine trees that stretch up and steadily march through the frame with the progress of the train'.[461] This shot, with the camera pointed directly upwards whilst tracking forward with the movement of the locomotive, would be a near-perfect match to the procession through the woods in the Coen brothers' third film. Seen in the opening credits, and again when Tom is taken to the titular crossing, the camera, like the proposed shot in *To the White Sea*, looks directly at the uppermost tree line. In the later scene from *Miller's Crossing*, an eye-line match cut reveals that this angle is Tom's point-of-view as he gazes upwards as he is marched, also accounting for the forward movement of the camera, deeper into the woods.[462]

Figure 86 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

[461] Coen and Coen, 'To the White Sea', p. 56.
[462] *Miller's Crossing*.

Figure 87 - Screenshot from *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

This is a clear example of introspective remediation, a process examined in detail in chapter seven, however, earlier in *To the White Sea*, the screenplay describes a shot which will find the camera 'TRACKING THROUGH TREES'.[463] It is not stated that this will also be a P.O.V. shot, therefore it is possible that these scenes, especially considering the Japanese setting, are not simply remediating *Miller's Crossing*, but, suggest that the Japan that they are conjuring is a remediative construction, by also recalling Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), which also features similar shots.[464]

[463] Coen and Coen, 'To the White Sea', p. 47.
[464] *Rashomon*, dir. by Akira Kurosawa (Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1950).

Figure 88 - Screenshot from *Rashomon* (1950)

Not only does this illustrate how the Coen brothers recall their own films, but also, at the same time, how they can combine this introspective form of remediation with more direct remediations of influential sources to construct adaptations which become amalgamative remediations.

The most apparent example of this comes during an encounter on another train. In Dickey's novel, during his journey north of Tokyo, Muldrow discovers train tracks. When the engine eventually appears, it is made up of multiple open freight cars full of logs, which the protagonist hides amongst, and by riding the train, his journey northward is advanced.[465] The Coen brothers include this in their adaptation, but they also invent an earlier incident where Muldrow attempts to stowaway in a boxcar. When he spots the train, he pulls himself into a car only to find it occupied. An elderly Japanese man, presumably a hobo, is sitting inside.

[465] Dickey, pp. 146-169.

The screenplay describes the surprise of the encounter, as Muldrow, usually thinking three moves ahead, is caught unaware. Unmoving, 'Muldrow stares back,' at the stowaway, who simply 'gapes' at him. There is no altercation between the two men, instead, Muldrow vanishes from the moving train as suddenly as he appeared, leaving the local staring, no doubt wondering if it was all a hallucination.[466] The peaceful resolution in this instance seems at odds with the understanding of Muldrow's characterisation. Throughout both Dickey's novel and the Coen brothers' adaptation, the American gunner shows no regard for Japanese life, killing men and women, young and old, regardless of their situation, a mentality which seems acceptable due to 'being at war'. Indeed, this encounter on the train would, according to other chance encounters in both texts, result in a killing. This scene is so diametrically opposed to the way Muldrow is otherwise presented, however, that it seems that the Coen brothers' have included it as a remediation of another filmmaker.

The invention of this encounter with the homeless man shows their wider frame of influence in their adaptation of an existing source. Undoubtedly, any form of direct adaptation, as is presented in *To the White Sea*, owes a great deal to its original source, but this does not eliminate the possibility of various other inspirations also shaping it, hence why this thesis posits that the Coen brothers are in fact remediative filmmakers. This distinction would certainly aid the understanding of Muldrow's interrupted train journey. This moment appears to have been directly inspired by Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*. Having already influenced one of the final images of *Miller's Crossing*, and provided both the title and structure for *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, there is little question that *Sullivan's Travels* is a source of great inspiration for the Coen brothers. In fact, Sturges' story of the eponymous screenwriter's odyssey across America is also remediated through Muldrow's first train ride in *To the White Sea*.

Attempting to get a real experience of suffering American life for his next picture, Sully poses as a hobo. In his research, he meets a young woman, The Girl (Veronica Lake), and together they set out to live with the downtrodden. This involves travelling in a freight car, much as Muldrow tries to in the Coen brothers'

[466] Coen and Coen, 'To the White Sea', pp. 55-56.

script. Sullivan and The Girl eventually get on the moving train, their difficulty in doing so drawing the attention of the car's other stowaways, who refer to the pair as 'Amateurs'. Sullivan's questioning of his fellow passengers results in a staring match, similar to the one in the unfilmed screenplay, which ends with the labourers leaving the car and climbing down the train.[467] Although this scene maximises the comedic impact, it seems that this part of *Sullivan's Travels*, as unlikely as it sounds, influenced *To the White Sea*.

Identifying remediations of other films would of course be easier if *To the White Sea* had been produced, however, the screenplay is set out in such a vividly visual manner that it is still possible to recognise these moments. This is the case in the screenplay's finale, as Muldrow, now in the snows of Hokkaido, is surviving in a cabin alongside a hawk, the two hunting together. One day, his new existence is disturbed by the 'dull flat crack' of a gunshot. Muldrow has been found by Japanese soldiers, one of whom advances on the fallen American, drawing a sword. The soldier raises 'the sword high over his head', bringing it 'down with a great whoosh' as 'on impact [the screen] cut[s] to white'.[468]

This moment, where the screen cuts to white, is replicated several times throughout the script when Muldrow remembers his Alaskan upbringing. If filmed in the way it is described, the repeated 'cut to white' would inevitably recall *The Innocents* (1961). The director, Jack Clayton, alongside his editor, pioneered an effect 'whereby the film would be using dissolves that burn out into white instead of fading into the usual black.'[469] It seems highly likely then that the Coen brothers' took the inspiration for their stark cuts from *The Innocents*, and probable that to execute the technique that they would have used the same method as Clayton developed half a century earlier.

The mirroring of an original filmmaking technique from the 1960s would certainly create a hypermediative through-line to classic cinema, fitting the remediative style of the Coen brothers. However, it is interesting that whilst they appear to be actively remediating *The Innocents* through the cut to white, at the

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[467] *Sullivan's Travels*.
[468] Coen and Coen, 'To the White Sea', pp. 88-89.
[469] Neil Sinyard, *Jack Clayton: British Film Makers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 82.

same time they entirely omit the novel's use of another vivid colour shock. When Muldrow recalls life on the Brooks Range in Dickey's novel, he often associates the memories with the image of a blood red wall in his father's cabin. Throughout the novel, the gunner remembers coming 'in off the snow and look[ing] right straight into the red wall'.[470] Muldrow's visions of his peaceful existence on the tundra inexorably involve variants of this image, 'as red as any blood in the snow',[471] the visceral colour coming back to Muldrow as vividly as the white of the snow, and because this is such a shock against the Alaskan crispness, it arguably creates a stronger impact. Yet, it is the whiteness which dominates the colour palette of the Coen brothers' script, whilst, the red (fundamental to Dickey's novel) is entirely absent from the unfilmed adaptation. This is an important creative decision, as focusing on the whiteness gives the Coen brothers' *To the White Sea* its own individual starkness, and the full significance of the project's colour palette will be analysed later in connection with *No Country for Old Men* and *Fargo*.

These examples highlight how the Coen brothers remediate those sources which have inspired them, and the ending of *To the White Sea* features a camera angle whose use recalls a film which was remediated in the final scene of *Miller's Crossing*. After the sound of the gunshot, highlighted above, the finale of *To the White Sea* would reflect the unexpected nature of this turn of events through its use of technique. Realising that 'he has been hit in the chest', a 'low angle [D]utch point-of-view' shot would be employed to show the enemy advancing toward Muldrow. Three shots later, the same technique is used again as the end comes closer.[472]

[470] Dickey, p. 12.
[471] Ibid., pp. 46-47.
[472] Coen and Coen, 'To the White Sea', p 88.

Close on Muldrow shows him reacting to the shot; he has been hit in the chest. He looks to the side.

His low angle dutch point-of-view shows men just starting to materialize in the snow, walking towards him.

Muldrow looks up.

His point-of-view up shows snow falling straight down, and the hawk circling above, watching.

Muldrow (voice-over)
For most of you flight is not in you, and never will be in you. Even when you're in an aircraft it's not in you. But the great thing about birds, especially if they're predators, is that anyone who loves them, who understands them; his mind, his imagination can fly with them. I don't think God himself could ever want anything more. . .

He looks back down, across the field.

The same low dutch angle shows the men drawing nearer. They carry guns; they are soldiers, in white winter gear.

Figure 89 - Excerpt from Unfilmed Screenplay of *To the White Sea* (1998)

The Dutch, or oblique, angle is a shot in which the camera is tilted away from the vertical, and it is used to physically show when a situation becomes skewed, either literally or metaphorically. The fact that this also manifests itself as a point-of-view shot reflects how Muldrow's world has been knocked off-kilter by the sudden appearance of enemy soldiers and the bullet.

The Coen brothers have never, before or since, employed a Dutch angle in their films, but its use here suggests a further remediation of *The Third Man*; also recalled in *Miller's Crossing*. Although this type of shot has been used extensively, no film is as synonymous with it as Reed's. Featured throughout the film, the tilted camera angle is routinely used to demonstrate that the world, or rather Martin's perception of it, is skewed. The selective use of this angle during the climax of *To the White Sea* functions in a similar way. Muldrow's view of the world, and indeed the viewer's perception of the story, has been skewed from the start. The Alaskan gunner has been presented as the protagonist from the outset, but a review of the facts suggests that at the end the audience should not mourn his death, reflected in the off-kilter effect of the Dutch angle. In the script, Muldrow shows no intention

of returning to the Air Force, essentially deserting after surviving the downing of his B-52, then goes on to kill several innocent Japanese civilians. Flashbacks also reveal that even before his enlistment, Muldrow was a murderer, whilst he, despite being an American in a Hollywood film, is the enemy, the outsider in Japan. Therefore, the skewed vision of the Dutch angle employed during the finale of *To the White Sea* is more than just a visual remediation of *The Third Man*, it is also a recollection of that film's themes on individual morality and realities around World War Two, as well as being a reflection of the true off-kilter symbolism of Muldrow's story.

In these final moments, the unfilmed screenplay also comes full circle, perfectly bookending the proposed film, and this analysis. As the Japanese approach, Muldrow's voiceover once again returns, telling the audience that 'For most of you flight is not in you, and never will be in you.' Following the P.O.V. shot and the Dutch angle detailed above, the rest of the voiceover is delivered in conjunction with the soldiers approaching, and eventually beheading him, finishing with the cut to white. Muldrow informs the viewer that, 'When I tell you this, just say that it came from a voice in the wind: a voice within a voice, which doesn't make a sound', before finally concluding that they will always hear it 'any time it snows, or even just when the wind is from the north. Everywhere in it, for the first time and the last, as soon as I close my eyes'.[473]

[473] Ibid., pp. 88-89.

. . . When I tell you this, just say that it came from a voice in the wind: a voice within a voice, which doesn't make a sound. . .

We go back to Muldrow. His point-of-view shows the soldiers arriving; our low angle is extremely steep on the nearest man, who is drawing a sword.

. . . I was in the place I tried to get to. I was in it and I had it. And I will be everywhere in it from now on. . .

The man cocks the sword high over his head. There is the tinkle of the circling hawk.

. . . You will be able to hear me just like you're hearing me now. . .

He brings the sword down with a great whoosh and on impact we cut to white.

. . . You can pick it up any time it snows, or even just when the wind is from the north. Everywhere in it, for the first time and the last, as soon as I close my eyes.

The tinkling bell nears.

With a whoosh the hawk enters frame. It shoots into the background and we slowly pan down with it as it recedes, its shape softened more and more by intervening snowfall.

Our easy adjustment down has brought horizon drifting up into frame: distant mountains, very indistinct.

The bird too becomes less distinct as it grows smaller, smaller, and finally merges into the landscape.

Figure 90 - Excerpt from Unfilmed Screenplay of *To the White Sea* (1998)

Only at the end is it revealed that the disembodied voiceover from the beginning of the film is delivered by Muldrow as a child, giving this closing an even stronger resonance. This means that the only voiceover in *To the White Sea* belongs to the Alaskan, informing the audience that this is nothing but Muldrow's story. This perfectly captures the Coen brothers' approach to adaptation, as by having their script come full circle in its conclusion, it remains faithful to the original source, but it also uses remediation throughout to recall other influences. By comparing *To the White Sea* with their subsequent adaptations, everything seems to suggest that it would have been a significant entry in the Coen brothers' canon, and as highlighted above during the discussion of just one brief scene, the unfilmed adaptation bears a striking resemblance to their film of *No Country for Old Men*.

'What's the most you've ever lost on a coin toss?'

Some believe that the first few years of the 21st century marked the Coen brothers' decline as interesting filmmakers. For Christopher Orr, whilst it was 'handsome and intermittently intriguing, *The Man Who Wasn't There* was grim and remote; *Intolerable Cruelty* […] was scarcely [recognisable] as a Coens' film at all […] [meanwhile, *The Ladykillers*] is, by a substantial margin, the worst movie the Coen brothers have ever made.' [474] John Patterson, however, offers a different interpretation of this downturn, noting that 'things in the early 2000s seemed a little more serious. For a start, the brothers were no longer directing scripts that had fermented and matured in the hothouse of their shared brain; they were adapting novels and rewriting other people's scripts […] [this] started when a long-cherished project, an adaptation of *To the White Sea* […] fell apart.'[475] Interestingly, Patterson directly associates the perceived decline in their creative output with the abandonment of *To the White Sea*.

In the above analysis, a link was established between the unfilmed screenplay and *No Country for Old Men*. Noted were the striking similarities of the pharmacy scene, and the general characterisation of Muldrow and Chigurh. As Patterson states, 'it seems like [*To the White Sea* was] a signpost to' their McCarthy adaptation. Indeed, the two projects share 'many things […] particularly a fascination with processes, the mechanics of things, machismo, and lengthy sequences without dialogue or music.'[476] This view was all but confirmed by the Coen brothers themselves in their interview with Patterson. Following the note that both projects share many features, Joel affirmed, 'that's definitely true, something that we had both thought about to a certain extent. In fact we mentioned Dickey's book to Cormac a few times when we talked to him about anything relating to the book.' Ethan then added that *No Country for Old Men* 'sort of displaced that project in a lot of ways.'[477] As a final point, Patterson then commented on the comparisons which could be drawn between *To the White Sea* and John Boorman's *Hell in the Pacific* (1968). Joel was quick to establish the Boorman links with their Dickey

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[474] Christopher Orr, '30 Years of Coens: *The Ladykillers*', *The Atlantic*, 22nd September 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/09/30-years-of-coens-the-ladykillers/380530/ [date accessed: 15th February 2016].
[475] John Patterson, 'Interview with Joel and Ethan Coen about *No Country for Old Men*', *The Guardian*, Friday 21st December 2007, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/dec/21/coenbrothers [date accessed: 1st April 2015].
[476] Ibid.
[477] Ibid.

adaptation, but also with *No Country for Old Men*. He freely confirmed, 'That's exactly right, [Boorman's film] is a good example of the same sorts of things we have here in [*No Country for Old Men* as well]: almost no dialogue, a bizarre score, and guys fighting and doing lots of stuff with their hands.'[478] It is clear then that not only did the screenplay of *To the White Sea* inform and influence the Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men*, but that in itself this was also an exercise in multi-layered and faceted remediation, speaking to their process of adaptation.

The influence of their unfilmed adaptation of *To the White Sea* on the subsequent *No Country for Old Men* is again evident in the inclusion of an incident not featured in McCarthy's novel. Solely attributable to the Coen brothers, as they also invented the moment in the unfilmed screenplay of *To the White Sea*, it comes as Moss flees from mystery pursuers. Returning to the scene of the shoot-out in the desert where he found the money at the beginning of the film, he is seen by mystery assailants. Chasing him through the inky black night in an illuminated truck, the men shoot him, pitching Moss forward over a cliff face and into the river below. His pursuers send their Pit Bull after him, and when they reach a bank downstream, Moss shoots the dog dead.[479]

Figure 91 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

[478] Ibid.
[479] *No Country for Old Men*.

In his analysis of the film, Adams asserts that, 'for the most part faithful to the novel, the Coens embellish McCarthy's story with additional narrative elements, such as [this].'[480] Indeed, the events of the novel are also reordered by the Coen brothers. In McCarthy's story, Moss is not shot until after he has attempted escape down the river.[481] As he emerges from the water, he is 'hit in the upper arm by a buckshot [that] stung like a hornet.' After tending to the wound, Moss, just as shown by the Coen brothers, picks 'up the pistol', taking it apart, inspecting and reassembling it.[482] In the novel, there is no animal; however, the film's depiction of this moment is strikingly similar to the flashback scene from *To the White Sea*, highlighted above, where Muldrow kills one of his sled dogs. Like the Alaskan, Moss does not necessarily relish killing the dog, but it is imperative for his survival. This seems to confirm that their adaptation of *No Country for Old Men* was indeed informed by their unfilmed screenplay. This suggests that this film is actually a remediative hybrid of McCarthy's source novel and their aborted adaptation of *To the White Sea*.

It is important to establish that the film of *No Country for Old Men* is a hybrid adaptation, and not just a remediative product of *To the White Sea*, as certain elements are not shaped by the latter at all. The most obvious example of this comes in the setting of some passages. The wintriness of Alaska and Northern Japan are such a fundamental part of *To the White Sea* that, had the unfilmed screenplay solely informed *No Country for Old Men*, this would also have had to have been featured in their adaptation. After all, in McCarthy's novel, the weather gradually worsens and becomes increasingly snowy. In one example from the book, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell travels down to Eagle Pass, a Texas town on the Mexican border where Moss and Chigurh have had a shoot-out. After he has inspected the carnage, he drives 'back to Sanderson [where] it began to snow.' When he gets to his house, he finds that 'The falling snow drifted and turned in the warm yellow light.'[483]

McCarthy's novel is set in the winter, and the snow and whiteness increase as the story progresses. In the Coen brothers' adaptation, however, the season is

[480] Adams, p. 167.
[481] Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (London: Picador, 2011), pp. 31-35.
[482] Ibid., p. 34.
[483] Ibid., p. 136.

not stated and not a single wintry image is apparent. Their script, however, opens with a fade into the image of 'Snow falling in a gusting wind.'[484] Whilst not included in the finished film, at the very least this does suggest a relationship between their *No Country for Old Men* and the unfilmed project. Although the weather has no impact on the wider plot, in a purely visual sense, its inclusion would surely have been incorporated into the film had the screenplay of *To the White Sea* been the primary base for their adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*. Nevertheless, the progressive worsening of the weather plays an important visual role in their later adaptation of *True Grit*. Therefore, its omission from *No Country for Old Men* is perhaps attributable to their knowledge of what they wanted to do in a future project, thus avoiding repeating themselves.

Another striking feature from McCarthy's novel which echoes *To the White Sea* is omitted from the Coen brothers' adaptation. The novel utilises Bell as an anchor point for the story, and although the action is routinely divided between the three differing perspectives of the main characters (Bell, Moss and Chigurh), it is Bell who functions as the narrator of the story, with each chapter opening with a monologue from him informing the reader about the case or his own backstory. This narration, bar the opening, is eliminated for the Coen brothers' adaptation, meaning that a significant amount of Bell's characterisation is lost in translation from page-to-screen. This information is not important, in fact, given Bell's age it could be read as assumed that he (like Muldrow) served in the Second World War. However, due to the Coen brothers' admission that *To the White Sea* shaped their McCarthy adaptation, its inclusion would seem natural. Recounting the story, Bell becomes side-tracked: 'I [won't] talk about the war neither. I was supposed to be a war hero and I lost a whole squad of men. Got decorated for it. They died and I got a medal. I [don't] even need to know what you think about that there aint a day I [don't] remember it.'[485]

This part of Bell's backstory is inconsequential, but nevertheless it would solidify the established relationship between the adaptations of *To the White Sea* and *No Country for Old Men*. Highlighting that Bell was a veteran of World War Two would immediately recall the character of Muldrow for those familiar with the

[484] Coen and Coen, *No Country for Old Men*, p. 1.
[485] Ibid., p. 195.

earlier project. Undeniably, the psychology and motivations of these two are on a different spectrum, Bell is the hero whilst Muldrow skews closer to the characterisation of Chigurh, but there may be another explanation for this omission. In his review of the film, Peter Bradshaw reflects that the Coen brothers got rid of

> the details of Ed Tom's experiences in [the] [S]econd [W]orld [W]ar and with it some of the Sheriff's internal life and his need for redemption, but this omission has the effect of intensifying the motiveless, ahistorical quality of the action, the sense that the contest between the good guys and the bad guys under the Texan sun has become even more eternally brutal.[486]

As Bradshaw points out, there is a valid reason for excluding Bell's past. Including this information would not really serve any purpose. Indeed, for those with a knowledge of the earlier abandoned adaptation, it would only function as a connection with *To the White Sea*. This sufficiently illustrates that the Coen brothers' earlier screenplay was not the only reference point for their McCarthy adaptation. Whilst it was influential to the later adaptation, the unfilmed screenplay was not used indiscriminately. If it made more sense to lessen a possible link between the two projects, the Coen brothers omitted the connections; *To the White Sea* was just one of the varied sources which shaped *No Country for Old Men*.

'Call it. This is your last chance.'

Examining the similarities and differences between *To the White Sea* and *No Country for Old Men* is interesting from a remediative standpoint, but an analysis of these moments, alongside passages from the novel, can also be used to illuminate the Coen brothers' approach to adapting a specific author. McCarthy writes in an 'extravagant' style,[487] and as Willard P. Greenwood summarises in *Reading Cormac McCarthy* (2009), '[his] novels are notoriously difficult to adapt well into movies'.[488] Therefore, it is remarkable that those same McCarthy scholars who believe his work does not translate well to the screen, like A.O. Scott as quoted

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[486] Peter Bradshaw, 'No Country for Old Men', *The Guardian*, Friday 18th January 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jan/18/drama.thriller [date accessed: 27th June 2017].
[487] Peter Josyph, *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 214.
[488] Willard P. Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), p. ix.

by Erik Hage, should regard the Coen brothers' film as a 'meticulous adaptation… Faithful to both the mood and the language' of the novel.[489]

Adams remarks in his study that the Coen brothers maintain 'a respectful degree of fidelity to the original. Most of the novel's narrative as well as its central characters and themes have been preserved […] As an adaptation, the Coens' movie renders McCarthy's novel with admirable economy. The density and pace of the novel's narrative is smoothly translated to the screen'.[490] Speaking directly to their adaptation process, Patterson remarks that most 'of the dialogue in *No Country* is taken from the book almost word for word.' Agreeing with this, Joel mischievously remarked on their approach to adaptation, stating that 'Ethan once described the way we worked together as: one of us types into the computer while the other holds the spine of the book open flat. That's why there needs to be two of us - otherwise he's gotta type one-handed. That's how you "collaborate" with someone else.'[491] This tongue-in-cheek summary appears to reflect how the Coen brothers approach the process of adaptation. They use a source novel as their foundation, but not as the only influence, making it more concise and linear to conform to a film-friendly narrative through modes of remediation (their form of collaboration).

This process of adaptation employed by the Coen brothers here and in their other adaptations, through which they make the story more linear and concise, is evident in several examples from the film which differ from the novel. As highlighted above, the Coen brothers ditched Bell's on-going narration, a key structural element of McCarthy's book. The film still shifts between the characters, but the narrative construct is almost eliminated. Instead of having Bell's voiceover introduce each segment of the film, they only utilise it for the opening. This also trims down on the length of the novel, as these narrative passages form large blocks of the book and are inconsequential to the wider plot as they either serve to inform us of Bell's history or summarise the following chapter. This second function is abundantly clear towards the novel's climax. At the opening of the ninth chapter, Bell is telling the reader that he knows Moss's wife, Carla Jean, did not tell him

[489] Erik Hage, *Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), p. 84.
[490] Adams, p. 167.
[491] Patterson.

everything. This refers back to a meeting described in an earlier chapter, however, Bell then notes that 'I never saw her again […] Then when they called me from Odessa and told me what had happened I [couldn't] hardly believe it. It [didn't] make no sense. I drove up there but there [wasn't nothing] to be done.'[492] This is a reaction to Carla Jean's murder and the Sheriff's inability to bring Chigurh to justice for it. However, this only unfolds as the chapter progresses, so, whilst Bell begins by recounting a past event, his narration then moves on to summarise the coming chapter. This arguably destroys the tension of the confrontation as the reader knows that it ends with Chigurh killing Carla Jean, raising the possibility that *No Country for Old Men* is being 'written' by Bell himself after the fact.

Regardless of the narration's function in the novel, in the film, the opening voiceover appears faithful to McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*. However, it is also an indicator of the ways in which the Coen brothers adapt a dense narrative. Bell's first narrative passage in the novel tells how he once sent a 'boy to the gas chamber at Huntsville.'[493] This is a fitting opening to this story, as this information seems to encapsulate the Sheriff's lack of understanding of the society he now belongs to, he does not understand the crime or the motivation. It foreshadows the story that follows, he is an old man who no longer fits in (or understands) this modern America. In their version, this passage does feature in Bell's voiceover, but the Coen brothers include it as the closing of the opening narration, remediatively echoing the same sentiment as the novel, whilst also allowing their adaptation to comment on their own disenchantment with 21st-century America. It is also a way to remediatively comment about how they do not understand contemporary Hollywood; after all, this was released during the low point of their career when many wrote them off. Their film begins with Bell's drawl, 'I was sheriff of this county when I was twenty-five years old. Hard to believe. My grandfather was a lawman. Father too. Me and him was sheriffs at the same time, him up in Plano and me down here. I think he's pretty proud of that. I know I was.'[494] Following this brief personal history, Bell moves on to stories 'of the old-time sheriffs'. As he 'always liked to hear about' them, Bell does not waste the opportunity to talk about his

[492] McCarthy, p. 248.
[493] Ibid., p. 3.
[494] *No Country for Old Men*.

Texan predecessors, using them as another allegory for the changing times: ‘Can’t help but wonder how they would’ve operated these times.’[495]

This opening then segues into Bell’s anecdote about the gas chamber, yet it also captures the spirit of the novel’s narration by recounting the Sheriff’s backstory and an almost rambling history of the locality. Whilst it may appear superficially unfaithful to McCarthy, this in fact demonstrates both the economy and faithfulness of the adaptation. Instead of translating only the first of Bell’s narratives for their film, the Coen brothers take moments from the opening passages of several of the novel’s chapters to build their opening voiceover. The information about Bell’s beginnings as a lawman, his father and grandfather before him, comes from the narration which opens the fourth chapter of McCarthy’s novel.[496] Meanwhile, the tangent about ‘the old-timers’ comes from the third chapter, which begins with a discourse on the technology and weapons of the job, covering a lot of different issues before leading into the stories of the old sheriffs, and finishing with Bell’s belief that ‘bad people [can’t] be governed at all. Or if they could I never heard of it.’[497]

The Coen brothers distil this, merging the stories of the other lawmen with Bell’s history from the fourth chapter. This then leads into the narration taken from McCarthy’s opening, forming an introductory voiceover in the film which appears faithful to the novel. This is because, in a way, it is. Like the Coen brothers’ previous remediations of the American Detective fiction trinity, this is an amalgamation, albeit of just one novel and not of several works by one author. This then is a continuation of the amalgamative remediation seen in their earlier films, however, it also informs their overall approach to adaptation, as it is taking various examples of the source novel’s narration and condensing it into one. This eliminates the necessity of having Bell introduce each ‘act’ of the film, making the adaptation more economical than the novel. Yet, because it amalgamates several of the different narrations from the book, the film also remains true to McCarthy’s vision.

Also worthy of noting when considering the Coen brothers’ approach to adaptation are those plot threads which they omit entirely. There are two key

[495] Ibid.
[496] McCarthy, pp. 90-91.
[497] Ibid., pp. 62-64.

examples of this, the first being the appearance of a DEA agent. In the novel, Agent McIntyre is a clipboard-carrying official who Bell has dealt with before. McIntyre does not fully grasp what he has stumbled into, and Bell does not 'intend to make it easy' for him.[498] McIntyre is not seen again, although Bell does ignore a call from him later. His character's purpose is to highlight that this case would not be the responsibility of a local sheriff. In their adaptation, the Coen brothers do not bring in McIntyre, although Bell does dodge a phone call from a 'DEA agent' whom he is going to avoid as 'much as [he] can.'[499] The presence of McIntyre in the film would only serve to introduce a tertiary character, who would disrupt the tautness of the adaptation. Therefore, the omission of McIntyre is chiefly down to economy of translation, making it a form of indirect remediation (or adaptation in this context).

This is also true of the second, more major, omission. Whilst there may have been other considerations for eliminating the plot thread, including the fact that it could compromise others' view of Moss, reasons of economy account for the discarding of Moss' final journey with a teenage runaway. When he crosses back into America in McCarthy's novel, Moss buys a truck and sets out to drive back to his wife. Still suffering from the injuries that left him in a Mexican hospital, he picks up a teenage hitchhiker.[500] Asking her to drive, they pull off of the highway soon after to eat. After a brief switch to Bell's story, and another instalment of his narration at the beginning of the eighth chapter, the action diverts back to Moss and his companion. Now in a diner, the pair talk about their respective next moves. Moss suggests a motel, separate rooms, where they continue their discussions. Spanning another nineteen pages, this serves only to give the reader more insight into Moss, showing that he seems to be a decent human being. The necessity of this, however, is questionable, as it ends abruptly. Later in the same chapter, Bell discovers that the Mexican drug cartel from the desert shoot-out have found Moss and killed him, along with the runaway.[501] In the film, the Coen brothers eliminate this subplot, keeping only the essentials. Moss checks into the motel, Bell finds out, but as he arrives a car speeds away, and he discovers his 'boy' has been

[498] Ibid., pp. 95-98.
[499] *No Country for Old Men*.
[500] McCarthy, p. 211.
[501] Ibid., pp. 219-239.

killed.[502] The film gives Moss the ignominy of an off screen death, matching his dispatch in the novel, but achieves this with an economy of adaptation. The Coen brothers do not need to include this portion of the novel featuring the hitchhiker, as its motivation, showing Moss' caring and decency, has already been established when he returned to the desert with water for the dying man in an earlier scene. This omission is both economical, and yet also, counterintuitively, faithful to McCarthy's *No Country or Old Men*, illustrating how the Coen brothers adapt a source directly.

Additionally, there are also changes made to elements which do appear in both versions of *No Country for Old Men*. Highlighted previously were the alterations made to the structure and content of the novel's narrative method, however, another change appears to be more inconsequential. McCarthy simply introduces Chigurh without a physical description, simply noting that he stood 'in the corner of the [police station] with his hands cuffed behind him'.[503] Throughout, the reader is only told that he is thought of as the bogeyman. Near the end of the story though, Bell tracks down one of the young boys who witnessed Chigurh's car crash as he left the scene of Carla Jean's murder. The youngster tells Bell that Chigurh '[didn't] look like anybody. I mean there [wasn't nothing] unusual [looking] about him. But he [didn't] look like anybody you'd want to mess with. When he said [something] you damn sure listened.'[504] This is as close to a description of Chigurh's appearance as McCarthy gives, and even this is not much, all the reader learns is that there is nothing physically noteworthy about him.

In contrast, the Coen brothers alter this in their adaptation, giving Chigurh one of the most recognisable hairstyles in cinematic history. Now sporting a bowl-cut, their Chigurh is certainly unusual in appearance. Picking up on this, Patterson asked the Coen brothers about the 'hair, simultaneously terrifying and ridiculous.' In reply, Joel commented: 'That bowl is fantastic […] We saw that hair in a photograph of a guy in a bar in a Texas border town in 1979, and we just copied it.'[505] Chigurh's haircut then appears to be a purely stylistic choice, a remediation of another source not dictated by the novel itself, yet not detrimental to the spirit

[502] *No Country for Old Men*.
[503] McCarthy, p. 5.
[504] Ibid., p. 292.
[505] Patterson.

of McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, making this example of a minor change indicative of their amalgamative and remediative approaches to both adaptation and filmmaking. It also elevates Chigurh from being a rather forgettable antagonist in the grander literary canon into one of the most iconic villains in cinema.

Their approach to adaptation is also evident in passages which are lifted verbatim from McCarthy's novel. There are three notable examples of this, the first coming from a seemingly inconsequential few paragraphs from the novel. Following the appearance of McIntyre, McCarthy's attention switches to Chigurh. Tracking Moss and the money, Chigurh drives across 'the Devil's River Bridge just west of Del Rio.' On the crossing, the 'headlight[s] picked up some kind of a large bird sitting on the aluminum bridgerail up ahead'. Rolling down his window, he aims his pistol and fires at the rail, hitting it and sending the bird flying off.[506] The motives of this action are not explicit, with the description given suggesting that Chigurh is merely testing his weapon's accuracy with a homemade silencer fitted. However, given the character's other acts in the book, he could equally be antagonising the bird out of boredom, or trying to kill it. Open to interpretation and spanning just three paragraphs following a passage the brothers omitted from their adaptation, it would be understandable if this too were cut. Instead, the scene in the film plays out exactly as it appears on the page, with Chigurh firing at the sitting bird, followed by the noise of the bullet ricocheting off the rail.[507]

[506] McCarthy pp. 98-99.
[507] *No Country for Old Men*.

Figure 92 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Figure 93 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

In the Coen brothers' interpretation of this scene, however, there is little doubt as to the motivation of this act. It is clear in the film that Chigurh does not intend to hit the bird, if he had, the bird would be dead. This shows how, even when taken exactly as written in the original source, a cinematic adaptation can convey a

clearer understanding of a character's true motivations, so even copying excerpts verbatim can speak to a filmmaker's approach to adaptation.

The second example comes when Moss wakes up in a Mexican hospital. In the novel, Moss regains consciousness, turning 'on the pillow and [looking] into the eyes of a man sitting on a metal chair against the wall holding a bouquet of flowers.'[508] The visitor is Carson Wells, the man hired to retrieve the money. He has history with Chigurh and knows Moss and his wife will die if they do not take his offer of help. Their conversation goes on for ten pages, featuring a quip about Chigurh being 'the ultimate bad-ass',[509] and it is translated to the screen in a manner which captures the spirit of McCarthy's original. The film sees a dissolve relocate the camera into the hospital as Moss wakes to find Wells (Woody Harrelson), who greets him with flowers, in his room.[510]

Figure 94 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

[508] McCarthy, p. 148.
[509] Ibid., p. 153.
[510] *No Country for Old Men*.

Figure 95 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

This scene is a near-perfect visual translation of McCarthy's description. The dialogue, however, is stripped back. Attributable to the Coen brothers, the flow of the conversation feels more natural, and indeed economical, than in the sprawling ten pages of the novel. Importantly though, the salient information, including some direct McCarthy dialogue, is still featured, but in a leaner, more film-friendly fashion. This shows how an adaptation can accurately capture its original source through a spot-on translation of one element, here the images, whilst at the same time paring down another, the dialogue. This part-verbatim translation can also be used to demonstrate how the Coen brothers approach the process of adaptation.

The final example worth noting for its almost exact translation from page-to-screen immediately follows Chigurh's robbery of the pharmacy. Although this scene is also present in the novel, it is the killer's treating of his wounds with the stolen supplies which appears to have been translated word-for-word. Arriving at a motel, the novel details how Chigurh awkwardly undresses, getting in the bathtub, where he 'laved water over the wounds […] [turning] in the water and [studying] the exit wound.' Leaving the water 'a pale pink', he gets out of the bath and picks the debris out of his leg with forceps before disinfecting and covering the

wound.[511] In the film, this is recreated as though the description had been directly lifted from the novel (directly remediated). Removing his boots without bending and cutting off his trousers, a cut finds Chigurh washing his wound in a bath, staining the water. Through a series of cuts, making the scene a montage, the audience see him disinfect his leg, prepare a syringe, sterilise his tools, pick buckshot out of his leg, and emerge bandaged before collapsing on the bed.[512]

Figure 96 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

[511] McCarthy, pp. 163-164.
[512] *No County for Old Men*.

Figure 97 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Figure 98 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Using McCarthy's graphic description, the Coen brothers have adapted this scene exactly as it is presented in the novel. Through changes, omissions, and verbatim translations, they have created a film which is both faithful to its original source, yet also theirs. For all their joking about just typing out the novel, if the source needs reworking to fit in a film, it is, and if not, it is lifted verbatim. This highlights how the

Coen brothers' approach to adaptation is not dissimilar to their process of remediation. Through direct and indirect remediations of their source (remediative adaptation), they can (re)fashion a scene, or indeed an entire film, to fit their own story purposes.

The most striking example of their approach to adaptation, however, presents itself at the film's conclusion. In the final scene, Carla Jean (Kelly Macdonald) returns home from her mother's funeral, only to find Chigurh waiting for her in the house. Even though she does not have the money and he has no reason to hurt her, Chigurh gave Moss 'his word' that he would kill his wife. The only thing he can do for Carla Jean is let her fate rest on the toss of a coin. Asking her to 'Call it', she refuses, as 'The coin don't have no say. It's just you.' Following his explanation that he 'got here the same way the coin did', the camera cuts away to the exterior of the house as Chigurh emerges from the door. The audience have not seen the outcome of the coin toss, and cannot be sure of Carla Jean's fate, although the fact that he inspects his boots, most likely for blood stains, suggests she lost. Another cut finds Chigurh driving away from the house when he is accidentally rammed by another car. Stumbling from the wreckage, the apparently unstoppable killer has a bloody head and a bone sticking out of his arm. Paying two young witnesses for their silence and a shirt to fashion a sling for his broken limb, Chigurh limps away as the sound of sirens grows closer.[513]

[513] Ibid.

Figure 99 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Figure 100 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

A dissolve then sees this scene give way to a now retired Bell sitting in his home. Some time has passed since what was just seen, and Bell confides in his wife Loretta (Tess Harper) that he has been having dreams. Musing on old age and returning to his opening thoughts of 'back in older times', his dreams of his father, the dark and the cold appear to be related to death. There is no revisitation of the

case or tying up of loose plot threads, instead, Bell concludes ‘Then I woke up.’ Lingering on him for a few seconds, the screen then cuts to black, with the only sound being the ticking of a clock.[514]

The film ends with no resolutions and no follow-ups. As a conclusion, this is enigmatic to say the least, but one which nonetheless resonates with the viewer. In comparison, however, McCarthy’s novel outstays its welcome. As discussed above, Bell’s narration in the ninth chapter informs the reader that Carla Jean was murdered, but then the book describes the lead-up to her death, robbing the action of any tension. Truncated by the Coen brothers’ adaptation, the novel features more dialogue as Carla Jean begs for mercy, and Chigurh explains why he has come to kill her. Refusing to call the coin toss, Carla Jean eventually yields when Chigurh says ‘You should try to save yourself. Call it. This is your last chance.’[515] Unlike in the film, the novel actually reveals that she loses the toss, and following another two pages of back-and-forth between them, Chigurh shoots her.[516]

Following this, Chigurh has the car crash as he leaves, and he walks away on page 262. Instead of going to Bell’s dream analysis though, the lawman pays a visit to his uncle, a scene which the Coen brothers decide to include before Chigurh’s arrival at Carla Jean’s. The novel then details Bell’s investigation into her death, before he retires, leaving no doubt he is one of the old men of the title. A final chapter, consisting solely of his narration, describes his dreams, with Bell finally concluding ‘And then I woke up.’[517] Nearly fifty pages have elapsed between Chigurh’s exit and the end, making for a meandering finale, with little extra salient information or other worth.

In his review of the film, Bradshaw states that the Coen brothers ‘are true to the pessimistic severity of the book's ending’.[518] However, to equate the ending of the film with McCarthy’s is a disservice to the elegance of the adaptation. Distilling the novel’s lingering sixty pages into one final scene, the film’s climax is the prime example of the Coen brothers’ approach to translating an existing source from page-to-screen. At its end, the film possesses a sense of ambiguity, the audience

[514] Ibid.
[515] McCarthy, p. 258.
[516] Ibid., pp. 252-260.
[517] Ibid., pp. 260-309.
[518] Bradshaw.

cannot be certain of Carla Jean's fate or of any wider outcome regarding the case or Chigurh. Any conclusion can only be assumed, unlike in the novel where everything seems to be stated. The Coen brothers also move the exchange between Bell and his uncle to an earlier point, allowing their adaptation to have a leaner and more linear finale. Indeed, throughout this final scene, the film makes changes, omits details, and quotes some passages verbatim from the novel, demonstrating the varied strategies they employ when adapting, and indeed when remediating. As a result, the film of *No Country for Old Men* is recognisable as a McCarthy adaptation, but, above all else, it is foremost a product of the Coen brothers' remediative filmmaking.

The final point about the film's conclusion again links back to the screenplay for *To the White Sea*. The Coen brothers do not show the assumed death of Carla Jean as laid out by McCarthy. The motivation behind this is arguable, however, one explanation could lie in the scene's similarity to the one omitted confirming the fate of the blind man's wife in the earlier screenplay. In *To the White Sea*, the wife's death is not shown, the action simply cuts away to a later point, as it does when Chigurh is seen leaving the house. Keeping Carla Jean's death off screen in *No Country for Old Men* not only gives the scene ambiguity and connects it to the similar dispatch of her husband, but also recalls the unfilmed screenplay.

The Coenverse

The kinship between the adaptations of *No Country for Old Men* and *To the White Sea* does not seem to have been considered by many Coen scholars. Instead, when analysing the film's relationship to the Coen brothers' other work, they appear only to focus on the McCarthy adaptation's recollection of their completed films. In his analysis of *No Country for Old Men*, Adams invokes a duality between it and *Fargo*. Choosing to initially focus on both films' crossover success, he pays scant attention to the projects' similarities until he notes that 'McCarthy's nihilistic saga of human iniquity [conjures a darkness previously seen in both] *Blood Simple* and *Fargo*, two closely related precursors to *No Country for Old Men*.' [519] The

[519] Adams, pp. 164-166.

connection to *Blood Simple* will be explored shortly, however, it is prudent to initially address the strongest parallels between *No Country for Old Men* and *Fargo*.

The obvious starting point, indeed, the major connection between the two films identified by Adams, comes through characterisation. In *No Country for Old Men*, Bell is a determined crusader, schooled in the old ways of justice, who finds himself embroiled in a senseless case of escalating human cost. Unable to comprehend the case, or catch-up with Chigurh, whom he refers to as a 'ghost',[520] he is always at least one step behind the killer. In this respect, Bell is like the pregnant Marge Gunderson (McDormand). Another local law enforcer (this time in Minnesota instead of Texas), Marge cannot understand the circumstances she has stumbled into, despite the fact that her persistence finally sees her triumph.[521] Whilst the outcome is different, it is Marge's demeanour which foreshadows Bell, the two characters' only difference being 'a matter of geography' as both films centre 'on a provincial law officer who cannot comprehend the motives for the outrageous acts of violence [happening in their jurisdiction].' [522] This is a remediative product of the Coen brothers' own questioning of morality (good versus evil) in their films, and it also continues in the respective portrayals of the antagonists. As Adams further reflects, 'Chigurh [himself] has a precursor in the figure of Gaear Grimsrud [(Stormare) in *Fargo*], who is but one in a series of psychopaths populating Coen movies'.[523]

Adams focuses on the similarities in characterisation, but the more interesting comparison between the two films is highlighted by Patterson. In his interview with the filmmakers, he asserts that *No Country for Old Men* is 'the soberest movie they've yet made; arid [and] spare'. Citing the 'random viciousness' seen in *Miller's Crossing* and 'the ecstatic stylisation' of *The Man Who Wasn't There* (also applicable to *Fargo*), Patterson proclaims that the McCarthy adaptation 'has the starkness of [*Fargo*] (though it is yellow where [the earlier film] was a symphony in white)'.[524] This observation establishes a stylistic link between the two films, but it also raises another interesting comparison with *To the White Sea*. The

[520] *No Country for Old Men* (2007).
[521] *Fargo* (1996).
[522] Adams, pp. 166, 173.
[523] Ibid., pp. 172-173.
[524] Patterson.

unfilmed screenplay is dominated by its stark colour palette, with the snow becoming more dominant as the story progresses. Perhaps then *To the White Sea* represented a stepping stone between the whiteness of *Fargo* and the dominant yellow of the later film. After all, Patterson considers *To the White Sea* as the strongest 'signpost' of *No Country for Old Men*, which shares many things with the unfilmed project.[525]

This notion of the whiteness of *Fargo* contrasting to the starkness of *No Country for Old Men* via *To the White Sea* gives the McCarthy adaptation an even more important status in the Coen brothers' canon. It is covering ground they have explored previously, whilst also suggesting the direction they would take with *True Grit*. As discussed above, McCarthy's novel has a wintry setting. Although never dominant because of its Texas location, it nevertheless remains in the mind, with snow and the drawing-in evenings becoming more prominent as the action moves towards the climax. This foreshadows their later Western, where the weather closes in once Mattie and Cogburn cross into the Indian territory. Indeed, as they push further into the alien landscape, the snow gets worse, the yellowness of the first act slowly replaced with a whiteness.[526]

The suggestion that *No Country for Old Men* is an important entry in terms of the wider evolution of their canon is supported not only through its possible links to one of their more recent films, but also in its similarities to their first film. Patterson also conjures the similarity between the two, as Adams did, suggesting that with *No Country for Old Men*, 'the Coens have delivered a manhunt-thriller of mesmerising violence and remarkable narrative leanness, an almost academically precise exercise in the building and maintenance of unbearable tension and anxiety in the audience, and superficially reminiscent of the Texas noir of [*Blood Simple*].'[527] The similarities between the two films, however, are more than just superficial. As Stacey Peebles explains, the Coen brothers' adaptation 'has the closest ties with their first film […] which is set in Texas and engages the neo-noir

[525] Ibid.
[526] *True Grit* (2010).
[527] Patterson.

and crime thriller genres'.[528] This is expanded upon by Dennis Cutchins, who notes that

> Several elements of the Coens' *No Country for Old Men* will look familiar to fans of the filmmakers. The first, of course, is the setting. Both the novel and the film are set primarily in Texas, but the Texas of the Coen's *No Country* is closer to the Texas of *Blood Simple* […] [as Joel put it] not Texas as it exists, but as 'something preserved in legend, a collection of histories and myths.'[529]

Yet, whilst most critics focus on the Texas setting, there is a more striking similarity between the two films, one which also speaks to the Coen brothers' processes of adaptation and remediation.

As discussed above, McCarthy's novel begins every chapter with a section narrated by Bell, but for the film, the Coen brothers restrict the guiding voiceover, only utilising it for the opening. Bradshaw states that Bell 'has a goosebump-inducing opening voiceover about sending unrepentant young killers to the gas chamber, superimposed on prospects of the western terrain photographed by Roger Deakins; it recalls the famous aria at the top of the Coens' first film'.[530] The choice to impose the narration over a series of images is solely down to the Coen brothers, as is the restricted use of the voiceover. The literary medium of McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* cannot prescribe the look of this scene, as it is simply dialogue, however, as Bradshaw points out, this moment strongly recalls the opening of *Blood Simple*. Their debut film opens with Visser's voiceover about 'complainers'. His monologue lasts for 46 seconds, with an image of the general Texas setting appearing and dissolving into the next every six or seven seconds. The speech and procession of images ends on the car in which the audience first find Ray and Abby, as Visser explains that in Texas, 'you're on your own', the realisation being that the succession of seemingly unrelated images from the montage have featured no-one.[531]

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[528] Stacey Peebles, *Cormac McCarthy and Performance: Page, Stage, Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 135.
[529] Dennis Cutchins, 'Grace and Moss's End in *No Country for Old Men*', in *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach and Jim Welsh (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 155-172 (p. 163).
[530] Bradshaw.
[531] *Blood Simple*.

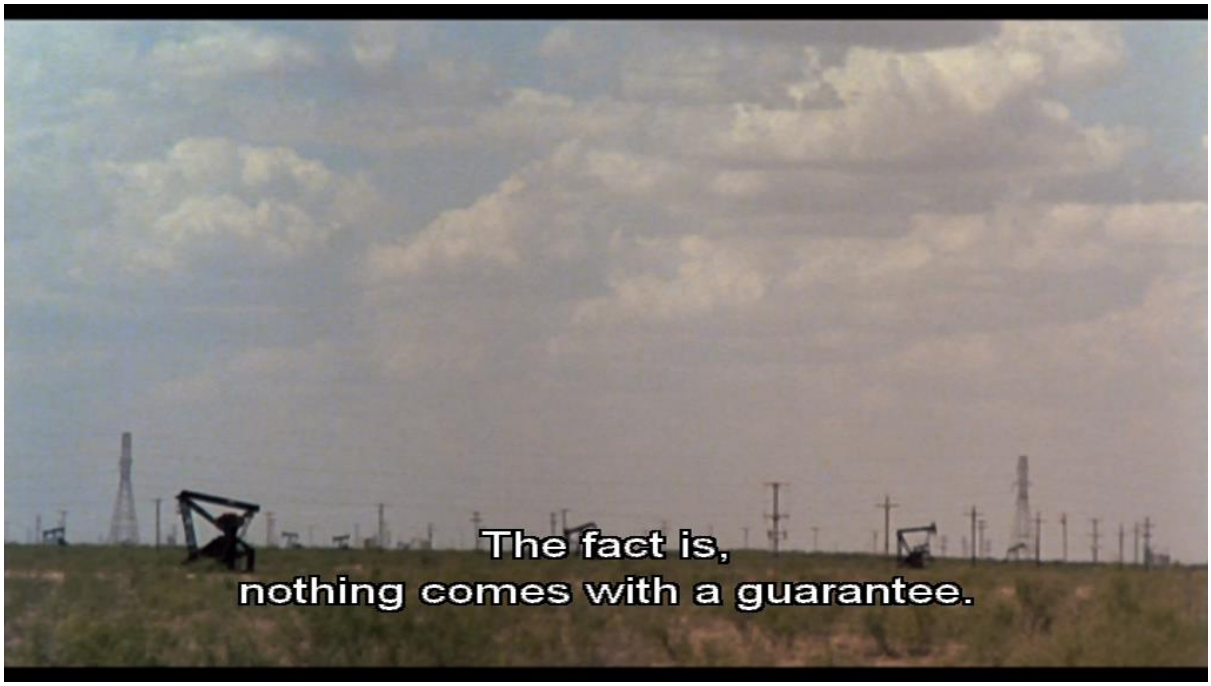

Figure 101 - Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Figure 102 - Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

Figure 103 - Screenshot from *Blood Simple* (1984)

This narration sets up the film's plot, as Marty is the complainer who has hired Visser to prove his wife's affair. However, 'nothing comes with a guarantee […] Something can all go wrong.' In Texas, this plan will not go as smoothly as in other places, by the end only Abby will be alive, 'down here on [her] own.'[532]

Compare this with the opening of *No Country for Old Men*, and the similarity is unmistakeable, despite some notable differences. Firstly, it is longer, clocking in at two minutes. Bell's voiceover opens on black as he muses on his youthful start as a lawman, with the montage effect seemingly having no identifiable pattern and the images simply cutting to the next, instead of transitioning smoothly through a dissolve. This, however, could be a deliberate decision, with the seemingly random procession of visuals reflecting the more rambling nature of the Sheriff's narration compared to the focused purpose of Visser's. The images themselves are more picturesque than the murky vistas seen in *Blood Simple*, showcasing the duality of beauty and loneliness in this Texas. Just as with their debut though, the Coen brothers 'morph' the narration into the main story, with the final image of the

[532] Ibid.

montage panning left to reveal Chigurh being arrested as Bell's voiceover concludes.[533]

Figure 104 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

Figure 105 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

[533] *No Country for Old Men*.

Figure 106 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

It is in these final moments that the entire point of Bell's narration is captured. As the camera pans around to Chigurh, Bell reflects on a past case and how things have changed, explaining 'I don't know what to make of that.' With Chigurh in the back of the patrol car, Bell notes that he does not want to 'go out and find something I don't understand.'[534] Unfortunately, that is exactly what happens when he becomes entwined with Chigurh. Visser's narration succinctly captured the plot of *Blood Simple*, but by introspectively remediating this opening in *No Country for Old Men*, the Coen brothers are merging themes together. Bell is in a Texas where 'you are on your own', a place he has overseen as Sheriff since he was too young and no longer understands. Indeed, this is no country for Bell, an old man of an extinct Texas which the montage tries to reflect.

Remediation in Adaptation

No Country for Old Men is also an important film in the Coen brothers' oeuvre on its own merit though. Despite having relationships to many of their other films, and whilst being a faithful adaptation of the novel, it is also a study of creative remediation. Whilst they are adaptations of a specific text, the Coen brothers' film

[534] Ibid.

translations are still full of instances which show the further influence of other works: they constitute remediative amalgamations, not just adaptations. One of the prime examples of this remediative facet in *No Country for Old Men* comes with the casting of Jones. Just as the casting of Bridges in *The Big Lebowski* and Finney in *Miller's Crossing* added a remediative weight (history) to the respective characters, so too does the addition of Jones here. As David Schmid explains, 'film stars have such strong intertextual identities [that the audience] are inevitably reminded of other roles they have played when we see them in a particular film.'[535] Jones is so associated with the Western genre, both as actor and now director, that his inclusion in the film lends a presence to Bell which is not matched in the novel. Speaking about the spot-on casting, Bradshaw describes how: 'The twang and roll of Jones's voice is controlled with a musician's flair and the craggy folds of his hangdog face are a Texan landscape in themselves.'[536] Bell is 'a welcome voice of sanity and humour' in the film,[537] whose embodiment by Jones lends an additional, remediative quality to the character.

This remediation also extends into characterisation. 'As a lawman on the eve of retirement who has lost his self-confidence and feels "over-matched" by the outlaws,' writes Adams, the cinematic Bell 'evokes Marshal Will Kane (Gary Cooper) in Fred [Zinnemann's] classic western *High Noon* (1952).'[538] Although the character of Bell faces the same situation in McCarthy's novel, it is Jones, and his screen persona, which means that this version of the Sheriff recalls earlier films. This trend continues with Chigurh, who 'recalls the classic villain: a hired gunman dressed in black and given to sadistic violence in the tradition of Jack Wilson (Jack Palance), the psychopathic gunslinger in *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953).'[539] It could be argued that due to its setting, *No Country for Old Men* is merely remediating many Westerns. It appears, however, that the connections to other influential films are a deliberate remediative process.

[535] David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2005), p. 129.
[536] Bradshaw.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Adams, p. 168.
[539] Ibid., p. 168.

More than simply being an archetypal villain though, in the film Chigurh recalls the characterisation and theme of *The Night of the Hunter*. In *Ride, Boldly Ride: The Evolution of the American Western* (2012), Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Stoehr list several cinematic versions of evil incarnate who are recalled by Chigurh, suggesting his 'malevolence reaches almost supernatural dimensions, reminding us' of the 'satanic preacher' in *The Night of the Hunter*, as well as the 'mysterious, revenge-driven "Stranger"' in *High Plains Drifter* (1973), directed by and starring Eastwood.[540] The similarities, however, extend further than just being another incarnation of the character type of Powell though. As Matthew Sorrento notes, as *No Country for Old Men* progresses, 'Chigurh comes as close to the mythical shadow figure as an element of realism can', representing a continuation of the characterisation used in *The Night of the Hunter*, a work which in many ways '[embodies] the Coens' film.'[541] Indeed, a kinship does exist between Laughton's film and *No Country for Old Men*: both being adaptations which have arguably become more recognisable than the source novels. A deeper consideration though uncovers a strong thematic link. Chigurh represents a bogeyman, 'the ultimate badass', who seemingly cannot be stopped. He shows no mercy, relentlessly pursuing Moss across the Texan backdrop, even visiting his wife after his death just to conclude matters.[542] In comparison, in *The Night of the Hunter*, Powell kills widows across the country, with the second half of the film focusing on his ceaseless pursuit of John (Billy Chapin) and Pearl Harper (Sally Jane Bruce), the children of his latest victim. No matter where they hide Powell always finds them. Indeed, he appears to be as unstoppable as Chigurh. The only difference being that in the end the Preacher meets his match in Rachel Cooper,[543] whilst the Coen brothers' hunter is never bettered, even beating death itself when he walks away from a car crash impossibly at the film's end.[544]

This deeper comparison can only be drawn after the entire film, but a link is established almost immediately. As Bell's voiceover continues in the opening scene, the montage of Texan horizons is replaced by the image of Chigurh being

[540] Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Stoehr, *Ride, Boldly Ride: The Evolution of the American Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 275.
[541] Sorrento, p. 162.
[542] *No Country for Old Men*.
[543] *The Night of the Hunter*.
[544] *No Country for Old Men*.

placed in the back of a police car. His arrest does not last long, however, as out of focus he is seen slipping his cuffed hands to the front, proceeding to strangle the arresting officer (Zach Hopkins). When the camera cuts back to the Strangled Deputy (his credit), it is in a close shot, meaning that the audience only see his lifeless feet.[545]

Figure 107 - Screenshot from *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

This remediates a key shot from the opening of *The Night of the Hunter*. Following the ethereal introduction, the camera cuts to an overhead angle of children playing in a field. A series of dissolves brings the action closer until one of the youngsters makes a grisly discovery in the house around which they are frolicking. In the open cellar lies a body. It turns out to be Powell's latest victim, established by a cut to him fleeing the scene in a car. The audience may not see this murder, but the manner in which the body is 'revealed' is remarkably similar to the corresponding scene in the Coen brothers' film, as all that is seen are the victim's lifeless legs.[546]

[545] Ibid.
[546] *The Night of the Hunter*.

Figure 108 - Screenshot from *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

The overriding similarities between the two films suggests that this is a deliberate visual remediation of *The Night of the Hunter*. This relationship is not apparent in the original novel, illustrating that even in a straight adaptation, the Coen brothers allow their own inspirations to shape their work; adaptation becoming remediation.

This process is also evident in relation to a line of dialogue from the film which is not present in the novel. Examining the shoot-out which pulls them into Chigurh's orbit, Bell's deputy Wendell (Garret Dillahunt) directs the Sheriff, 'OK Corral's just yonder.'[547] Solely attributable to the Coen brothers, this throwaway line of dialogue moves the characters swiftly on to the main crime scene, but also evokes images of every film about Wyatt Earp. Featured in Westerns like John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946), this allusion to the OK Corral shrewdly places the Coen brothers' film in the same realm as those classics, informing the

[547] *No Country for Old Men*.

audience of the scale of violence of the standoff, and also creating yet more hypermediative through-lines to classic Hollywood. This demonstrates that they have included recollections of other influences in their film, without distracting from the primary adaptation.

No Country for Old Men may appear to be the Coen brothers' least remediative work due to its particular faithfulness to McCarthy's novel, but on their own admission, it is influenced by other filmmakers who they admire. Patterson describes the film as 'a landscape-based western [with] classicism reminiscent of Anthony Mann and Sam Peckinpah'.[548] The links with Mann will be addressed shortly, but the Coen brothers do not baulk at the mention of Peckinpah. In fact, Ethan candidly confirms that they 'were aware of the basic link just by virtue of the setting, the south-west, and this very male aspect of the story. Hard men in the south-west shooting each other - that's definitely Sam Peckinpah's thing. We were aware of those similarities, certainly.'[549]

As Patterson continues though, 'Peckinpah is the director whose themes and concerns - masculinity and self-preservation among them - sit foremost in the mind when reading the McCarthy novel'. This suggests that the remediation of Peckinpah's thematic concerns is independent of the Coen brothers, however, the film also recalls some of his most memorable characters. As Ian Cooper states, the cinematic version of Chigurh represents 'a return to Peckinpah's Man [from *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974)] – an independent man of honour and violence who cannot function in normal society'.[550] Indeed, the ultraviolence and almost elegiacal tone of the film of *No Country for Old Men* could arguably be as much down to the style of Peckinpah's films as it is to the original novel.

Just as the cinema of Peckinpah represents a shorthand for violence and masculinity in the Western, Mann's films have also become synonymous with a particular style. In his early career Mann found himself directing melodramas and films of the noir distinction, which established his 'stylistic and thematic preoccupations: characters trapped in a hostile world with no escape but in

[548] Patterson.
[549] Ibid.
[550] Ian Cooper, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (Brighton: Wallflower Press, 2011), p. 106.

violence or obsessive madness.'[551] These sensibilities remained when Mann became known as a director of Westerns. David Boxwell states that Mann's 'films were significant for making the Western a more psychological and overtly violent genre, and Mann brought a noir sensibility to the Western unlike any other director.'[552] In the psychological Western, 'the vast distances of the American landscape would be matched by the depth of fall into the human psyche […] Within a pristine wilderness, new, disconcerting complexities became manifest. Neurosis and social disorder itself could ascend to the status of legend, the petty problems of the individual soul raised up into something archetypal.'[553] This classification also seems to fit *No Country for Old Men*, where the lonely and empty Texas presented in the film visually represents the mental states and situations of Bell and Moss. Discounting the violence, partly attributable to the influence of Peckinpah, it seems that Mann, as a chief exponent of the psychological Western, may be the influence for the troubling psychology and noir-like darkness of the Coen brothers' film. Even though they did not address it when Patterson brought it up, this suggests that he was correct to assume that the Westerns of Peckinpah and Mann are evoked in *No Country for Old Men*, influencing the tone of the adaptation as much as the novel.

The Coen brothers' film is an adaptation of McCarthy's novel, yet it is also a remediative creation. It is their own work which knowingly remediates stylistic and thematic elements from their influences, as well as taking the foundation of the resulting film from the source text. In his summary of the adaptation, Denby explains that even though the film is shaped

> by McCarthy's tough little sentences, which record action and thought but not sentiment, the Coens have hardened their style to a point far beyond what they accomplished in *Fargo*. The movie delivers an unparalleled sense of menace. What we're watching seems to fall somewhere between a bitter modern Western and an absurdist parable […] The movie is essentially a game of hide-and-seek, set in brownish, stained motel rooms and other shabby American redoubts, but shot with

[551] David Boxwell, 'Anthony Mann', *Senses of Cinema*, January 2003, http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/mann_anthony/ [date accessed: 4th July 2017].
[552] Ibid.
[553] Michael Newton, 'Lonely rangers: the dark side of westerns', *The Guardian*, Friday 6th May 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/may/06/dark-side-westerns-film-bfi-season-ride-lonesome [date accessed: 4th July 2017].

> a formal precision and an economy that make one think of masters like Hitchcock and [Robert] Bresson.[554]

More so than the novel, the film evokes a variety of classic influences. This is a result of the Coen brothers' richly remediative approach to filmmaking. They have translated *No Country for Old Men* to the screen in a way which renders it faithful to its source, whilst also utilising other works which have influenced them, illustrating how they are remediative adapters.

No Country for Old Men was the first Coen brothers' literary adaptation to be filmed, but as discussed, *To the White Sea* was an earlier attempt at translating an existing text from page-to-screen. Many similarities exist between the two projects, indeed, the filmmakers themselves admit that *To the White Sea* was very much in their minds when writing their McCarthy film. Both projects feature passages with little dialogue, a cross-country quest, and a lead character who could be described as psychopathic. However, through its adaptation of the McCarthy novel, as well as remediations of several influential films, genres and directors, *No Country for Old Men* is more than just their remediative response to the abandonment of *To the White Sea*: as I have shown in this analysis, it is a remediative adaptation. In the ways it connects back to their unfilmed screenplay, as well as to *Blood Simple* and *Fargo*, it also becomes an example of their growing propensity towards a more introspective form of remediation. This will be addressed fully in the seventh chapter through a detailed analysis of their two latest films. Meanwhile, the next chapter will explore how the remediative style of adaptation employed in *No Country for Old Men* is used in their films of *True Grit* and *The Ladykillers*, evolving so that these works become remediative reimaginings.

[554] David Denby, *Do the Movies Have a Future?* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2013), p. 244.

Chapter Six - Remakes, Remediations and Reappraisals: Approaching *True Grit* and *The Ladykillers*

Following the success of *No Country for Old Men*, the Coen brothers seemingly moved away from adaptation, releasing two films in quick succession. The first of these, *Burn After Reading*, appeared to conform with the amalgamous filmmaking style of their career before the aborted *To the White Sea*, whilst *A Serious Man* is the closest they have come to recapturing the reflective tone seen in *Barton Fink*. Based on their own upbringing in 1960s Minnesota, and described by Franz Lidz as a parable of the Biblical Book of Job, the film presents a 'bleakly antic meditation on divine intent, the certainty of uncertainty and the mysteries of Jefferson Airplane lyrics.'[555] A year later, however, the Coen brothers returned to adaptation with *True Grit*, which saw them fully embrace the Western genre, so often present on the periphery of their films. Dismissed by many before they had even seen it as a mere remake of the earlier John Wayne film, their *True Grit* is in fact more suitably viewed as a new adaptation of Charles Portis' 1968 novel. However, as I will show, the Coen brothers' remediative filmmaking elevates it beyond the notion of the mere remake or, for that matter, the adaptation.

As this chapter will argue, the film actually transforms many of the key plot and thematic elements of the novel, directly remediating them into the Coen brothers' version. These direct remediations are then amalgamated together with specific moments from Henry Hathaway's 1969 film of *True Grit*, alongside images and influence from other works, notably the fairy tales of Lewis Carroll and *The Night of the Hunter*. This means that their *True Grit* represents a creative reimagining of the original story; a product of the Coen brothers' remediative approach to filmmaking. The same creative process is also evident in *The Ladykillers*, which remediates certain elements of the 1955 film directed by Alexander Mackendrick, and amalgamates these with their own innovations, imagery of the American South, other sources, and again *The Night of the Hunter*, delivering another film which is a reimagining. The analysis of *The Ladykillers* will follow, but this chapter begins by addressing their *True Grit*.

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[555] Franz Lidz, 'Biblical Adversity in a '60s Suburb', *The New York Times*, September 23rd 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/movies/27lidz.html [date accessed: 28th August 2017].

Paramount Pictures acquired the film rights to Portis' novel before it was even published, with the sole intention of producing a star vehicle for Wayne.[556] Of course, this meant altering the narrative of the original story, which mainly deals with a fourteen-year-old girl's quest for vengeance for her father's murder. The novel features Cogburn, the Wayne role, as a secondary character, but in the film, he becomes the chief focus, in turn relegating the book's narrator (Mattie) to a supporting part. This negates the progressive nature of Portis' *True Grit*, as Cogburn is always presented as the hero in Hathaway's film, whereas, the novel views his heroism as a process. He starts off as a morally questionable character who becomes more worthy as the story progresses, but even when he does fulfil the heroic role, he ultimately falls short. He rescues Mattie from a snake-pit, but by the time he gets her to help, her arm succumbs to the venom from a bite and is amputated. In the 1969 film, Cogburn saves Mattie without these negative effects, whilst the other hero, the Texas Ranger named LaBoeuf (pronounced La-Beef), dies in the process. In the novel, LaBoeuf survives, although flashing forward twenty-five years, Mattie has never seen him again. Tellingly though, this time-jump also sees Mattie learn of Cogburn's death. In contrast, the 1969 film ends with Cogburn escorting the youngster to her homestead, before he rides off, with the action ending on a freeze-frame of Wayne.[557]

Admittedly, a final 'reveal' of a Wayne hero's death would invariably evoke memories of Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), where the actor plays the anonymous hero of the title, whose death is the driving factor of the entire film and its structure. Paramount's approach to *True Grit*, however, undoubtedly worked, as it saw Wayne receive his only Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of Cogburn. This though is one of the main reasons why the Coen brothers' *True Grit* should be considered as a new adaptation of Portis' novel, or, more properly, as I will argue in this chapter, as a remediation of it and not as a simple remake of the earlier film, as it reverts back to the original narrative details, not those created for Wayne.

[556] Bob J. Frye, 'Charles Portis', in *Updating the Literary West*, ed. By Thomas J. Lyon (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1997), pp. 497-503 (p. 498).
[557] *True Grit*, dir.by Henry Hathaway (Paramount Pictures, 1969).

Establishing a distinction between a remake and a second adaptation is more challenging than it appears though. A remake is defined by The *Oxford English Dictionary* as the act of making something 'a second or further time, or differently [...] to transform'. Whilst this classification suggests that the Coen brothers' *True Grit* is just a remake, a second variant of the original source, to label it as such is dismissive of the creative legitimacy of remediation as both a form of filmmaking and adaptation itself. In *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (2007), Thomas Leitch states that, 'Not all adaptations are created equal.'[558] The theory put forward by Geoffrey Wagner outlines three distinct methods of cinematic adaptation. Firstly, there is the transposition, 'in which a novel is given directly on the screen, with a minimum of apparent interference'. Then there is the commentary (or the restructure), 'in which an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect'. Finally, there is the analogy, 'a fairly considerable departure for the sake of the making of *another* work of art.'[559] As with most theorising, this has been elaborated as time goes by. Dudley Andrew added another three categories, concerning those adaptations 'where the original is held up as a worthy source or goal'. If the film uses only the basis of an existing text it is a borrowing adaptation. An intersecting adaptation preserves the ideas of an original source, whilst a transforming adaptation is an exercise in the 'quest for fidelity', in other words, a rote adaptation.[560] Whilst there are many other theories which offer distinctions between types of adaptations, these six categories illustrate how problematic it is to address the Coen brothers' approach to adaptation using existing theoretical frameworks. Therefore, it seems logical to extend the creative practices of remediation, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, to a more suitable postmodern approach to adaptation. This is because the distinct modes of remediation I detailed earlier (including direct and indirect) appear to correlate with many of the theories of adaptation noted above.

Whilst Hathaway's *True Grit* seems unquestionably to belong to the group Wagner identified as the commentary (it is a restructuring of the original novel, with the emphasis now placed upon the character of Cogburn), an argument could be

[558] Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 93.
[559] Ibid., p.93.
[560] Ibid., p.93.

made that the Coen brothers' *True Grit* fits into each and every separate classification of the adaptation to some extent. This is because they are exponents of a remediative approach to adaptation, where several influences and original innovations are amalgamated together creatively in a new form (to use the language of Bolter and Grusin, they 'enter into relationships of respect and rivalry' with them), separating this practice from conventional adaptation. As Leitch notes, Gerard Genette explores various modes of textual relations, one of which, intertextuality, concerns 'the actual presence of one text within another'.[561] It seems then that adaptation can be regarded as an intertextual practice, however, as explored in the introduction of this thesis, in postmodernity, intertextuality has been superseded by the more film-relevant concept of intermediality, which in turn can lead to the practice of remediation. This means that through the process of translating from page-to-screen, the Coen brothers have become remediative adapters. For, as well as using Portis' novel as a base inspiration, and incorporating occasional echoes of Hathaway's film, their *True Grit* also gathers together elements from other sources, creating a project which may start as a simple adaptation but ends as a remediative amalgam.

By utilising the creative practice of remediation in their filmmaking, the Coen brothers elevate their film beyond the realms of a mere remake, and into being a reimagining of the original novel. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines reimagining as 'the action or act of imagining something again, a reconstruction; a piece of art or literature, etc., which is a reinterpretation of another.'[562] By bringing together the influences of multiple sources from various media, and not just relying on the original source, they have delivered a remediation of *True Grit*. Whilst it is prudent then to consider the Coen brothers' film as a return to the novel, and therefore separate from the earlier film, that is not to say that their film is simply an unoriginal translation of Portis' *True Grit*. Instead, it represents a continuation of their amalgamative and remediative filmmaking, a reimagining.

In the Introduction to *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice* (2002) Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos state that remakes are subjected to

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[561] Ibid., p. 94.
[562] OED: Oxford English Dictionary, 'reimagine, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/249456?redirectedFrom=reimagine& [date accessed: 1st April 2016].

'the purgatory of casual reference and […] dismissal [and not viewed] within the purview of serious film criticism.'[563] Emphasising the value of reconsidering the concept of the remake, Forrest and Koos go on to note that whilst

> many remakes are indeed uninspired copies of their originals […] the existence of many critically acclaimed remakes hinders us from adopting as a general rule the widely accepted notion that all remakes are parasitical and not worth any critical consideration […] The remake is a significant part of filmmaking both as an economic measure designed to keep production costs down *and* as an art form.[564]

Also choosing to consider the merits of the remake as a separate filmic form, Constantine Verevis asserts that 'In the case of contemporary remakes, a pre-existing title is relayed and transformed through the "individual vision" and "personal perspective" of the [filmmaker, who] […] "makes aspects of [earlier] texts their own, overwriting them by incorporating references to their (rewritten) intertexts."'[565]

To illustrate his argument, Verevis uses some contemporary examples. Discussing Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* (2001), he notes that the film 'is not a remake but a "re-imagining" of both [Franklin J.] Schaffner's [1968 film] (and [of] Pierre Boulle's novel from 1963)'. Meanwhile, more relevant for this argument, given his many similarities with the Coen brothers, Verevis argues that in the 2002 iteration of *Solaris*, Soderbergh is not merely remaking Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 film, or even readapting the original 1961 novel by Stanislaw Lem. This is because Soderbergh's film is actually a revisitation of other versions of the story from across the media spectrum. For in contemporary cinema, 'the original material [or source] is […] filtered through the perspective of the [filmmaker]'.[566]

Discussing the notion of the remake again, Verevis, writing with Kathleen Loock in *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remake/Remodel* (2012), suggests that while

> newspaper and trade publications continue to condemn remakes for their commercial imperatives, the last decade has seen the appearance

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[563] Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos, 'Reviewing Remakes: An Introduction', in *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 1-36 (p. 3).
[564] Ibid., p. 3.
[565] Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 10.
[566] Ibid., p. 10.

> of a number of works that contest the idea that the remake is a debased copy of some superior original, seeking instead to understand the practice of remaking as one of several industrial and cultural activities of repetition (and variation) which range from quotation and allusion, adaptation and parody, to the process-like nature of genre and serial filmmaking.[567]

For some, the remake is seen as a 'malady' in 'critical discourse that routinely seeks to establish a distinction between production and *re*-production'. [568] Interestingly though, there is a distinction to be made 'between a remake and an adaptation,' according to Brett Westbrook, who stresses that a remake is solely 'a film based on a previous film, while an adaptation points to a literary source […] [meaning] that the field of adaptation studies must cede film remakes to another branch of the cinematic tree.'[569] With the consideration of remediation as a theory of filmmaking practice, I can illustrate that adaptations (first-time or otherwise) and reimaginings do in fact belong to a remediative 'branch of the cinematic tree', and analysis of the Coen brothers' approach to *True Grit*, widely viewed as a simple remake, can offer an insight into this distinct form of adaptation.

'People do not give it credence…'

In a 2011 interview with the brothers for *The Telegraph*, Will Lawrence asserted that their *True Grit* is 'Emphatically not a remake of the 1969 film, the Coens' version is much closer in tone and emphasis to the source material than that first adaptation.'[570] There are numerous ways to highlight this, but the wintry setting is a good starting point. From the opening, it is apparent just how fundamental the season will be in Portis' novel, as Mattie explains that 'People do not give it credence that a fourteen-year-old girl could leave home and go off in the wintertime to avenge her father's blood'.[571] Indeed, the weather becomes a defining aspect of the story, with routine mentions of the snow and the cold regularly featured

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[567] Kathleen Loock and Constantine Verevis, 'Introduction: Remake/Remodel', in *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remakes/Remodels*, ed. by Kathleen Loock and Constantine Verevis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-18 (p. 2).
[568] Ibid., p. 2.
[569] Brett Westbrook, 'Being Adaptation: The Resistance to Theory', in *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, ed. by Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), pp. 25-45 (p. 27).
[570] Will Lawrence, 'Joel and Ethan Coen on "True Grit": We completely ignored the original', *The Telegraph*, 28th January 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmmakersonfilm/8287138/Joel-and-Ethan-Coen-on-True-Grit-We-completely-ignored-the-original.html [date accessed: 1st October 2015].
[571] Charles Portis, *True Grit* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2012), p. 9.

throughout the narrative. Yet, in the Hathaway film, the wintry weather does not figure in the hunt for Chaney. In fact, despite the occasional glimpse of a snowy peak on a distant mountain during landscape shots, the characters do not encounter any seasonable weather until the final scene. Here, as Cogburn escorts Mattie (Kim Darby) back to her homestead, the snow has set in, with a relatively light covering on everything. Coming at the end of the film, this seasonal shift has little consequence on events, and given the role of the weather in the source novel, Hathaway's film seems to largely ignore it.[572] In contrast though, as outlined above and in previous chapters, the wintry setting of Portis' story is restored in the Coen brothers' film, if anything, adopting an even more symbolic and atmospheric presence in their *True Grit*, demonstrating that they have not simply remade the 1969 film, but rather gone back to using Portis' novel as one source of inspiration for their reimagining.

Their film unmistakably represents a new adaptation of the original novel, by the mere fact that it restores Mattie to the central role of the story. She drives the action, both as a permanent onscreen presence and as the narrator, contrasting the 1969 film. However, despite its standing as a new adaptation of the novel and not a remake of the earlier film, the Coen brothers' *True Grit* does still draw upon Hathaway's feature. Joel may deny it, 'I can honestly say we didn't re-watch the first movie [...] [it] was just something we saw as kids,'[573] but Hathaway's *True Grit* does inform part of their film. This is apparent in several instances, most notably in Bridges' portrayal of Cogburn. Although by no means imitating Wayne, Bridges' performance has nevertheless been inspired by the earlier version of Cogburn. This is evident in aspects and mannerisms in the Coen brothers' film which are purely attributable to Wayne's interpretation of the role. It is also illustrated in the scene where Cogburn, on horseback, faces down four mounted villains. Predominantly shot from Cogburn's perspective by Hathaway, it is also filmed this way in the 2010 version, even though in the novel this action is told from Mattie's point-of-view.

This can also be seen through examples of dialogue. During their first encounter at the courthouse in the Hathaway film, Cogburn tells Mattie that 'You

[572] *True Grit*, dir. by Henry Hathaway (Paramount Pictures, 1969).
[573] Lawrence.

can't serve papers on a rat, baby sister.'[574] In the corresponding scene in the Coen brothers' *True Grit*, Cogburn mumbles that 'I don't believe in fairy tales or sermons or stories about money, baby sister.'[575] Although expressing an entirely different sentiment, one much more in keeping with their depiction of the character and hinting at the fairy tale influence on their story, the Coen brothers' Cogburn also refers to Mattie as 'baby sister', and although the novel contains a similar expression, this manner of address has become so synonymous with Wayne, that by reciting it, Bridges is, intentionally or not, remediating the earlier performance.

Another example which supports the argument that the Coen brothers were actively remediating the 1969 film, and not simply remaking it, becomes evident in the realisation that their film has deliberately reversed (a form of indirect remediation) several compositions from the earlier feature. This trend is first, and most instantly, recognisable in the appearance of Cogburn. In the 2010 film Bridges' grizzled cowboy wears the character's signature eye patch over his right eye.[576]

Figure 109 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

[574] *True Grit* (1969).
[575] *True Grit* (2010).
[576] Ibid.

In Hathaway's version of *True Grit*, however, it is Cogburn's left eye which is covered.[577]

Figure 110 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (1969)

The 1969 iteration matches the novel, where Mattie notes Cogburn's 'bad left eye'.[578] On its own, this does not represent a major discovery, as a slight change in the appearance of one character could be attributable to any number of reasons. However, this process of reversing components is also apparent in the characterisation of Chaney. The Coen brothers' villain has a gun powder burn on his left cheek.[579]

[577] *True Grit* (1969).
[578] Portis, p. 64.
[579] *True Grit* (2010).

Figure 111 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

In contrast, the exact placement of the burn is never clarified by Portis, the novel simply describes how Chaney has a mark on an unspecified side.[580] In the 1969 presentation, however, Chaney (Jeff Corey) carries the scar on his right cheek.[581]

Figure 112 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (1969)

[580] Portis, p. 24.
[581] *True Grit* (1969).

These instances of visual reversals, however, only apply to the presentation of characters, so could simply be examples of the Coen brothers trying to differentiate their film from Hathaway's, as it also deviates from the novel which they say they returned to. Although, as this chapter is attempting to prove, their *True Grit* is not merely a remake of the 1969 film but rather a new translation of the source story, a creative product of their remediative style. This trend of reversing presentations then lends credence to the view that the Coen brothers' feature is not just an adaptation of Portis' novel, but also a reimagining of the story through its remediation of other sources.

Mattie's Adventures in Wonderland

In an article for *The Guardian*, in which the Coen brothers discuss the genesis and inspirations behind their *True Grit*, Joel noted: 'If anything [...] we were thinking about [the film] more in terms of Alice in Wonderland.'[582] Although it is difficult to instantly reconcile *True Grit* with Lewis Carroll's classic childhood fantasy, there is a certain kinship between *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Mattie's own adventure. In Carroll's fairy tale, Alice tumbles down a rabbit hole, which sees her emerge into the strange world of Wonderland. Meanwhile, in *True Grit* Mattie ventures into an alien territory in order to seek justice, this journey becoming her own metaphorical rabbit hole. This is represented on screen when she crosses the river into the Indian territory. Following the crossing, the weather closes in, with the snow falling and lying heavier the further down the rabbit hole they go. Mattie also encounters colourful characters in the territory, just as Alice does in Wonderland, the most striking example being Bear Man (Ed Lee Corbin). Wearing a bear skin, this traveller wanders the land finding dead bodies in the hopes of extracting and selling their teeth.[583] Whilst this is grimmer than anything in Carroll's first tale, the non-menacing demeanour of Bear Man, coupled with the way he appears from nowhere and is never seen again, could be equated with the Cheshire Cat or the Caterpillar from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Reinforcing the connection between their film and the story of Alice, Joel stresses that, like Alice's adventures, Mattie 'goes across the river into a place where she sees all these weird things [...]

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[582] Tom Shone, 'The Coen brothers: the cartographers of cinema', *The Guardian*, Thursday 27th January 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jan/27/coen-brothers-interview-true-grit [date accessed: 1st October 2015].
[583] *True* Grit. (2010).

and then it becomes weirder and weirder, pushing it more towards a [fairy tale] thing'.[584]

Despite what they say though, the Coen brothers' *True Grit* has a more striking parallel with Carroll's sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice found there* (1871) once again charts Alice's journey into and through a fantastical land, although this time she enters it through a mirror rather than by falling down a rabbit hole. Before Alice enters the looking-glass, it is noted that it is winter, the snow falling and covering the landscape, similar to the setting of the Western. Once in the strange looking-glass country, Alice ventures through various areas, meeting stranger characters as she goes, and just as with Mattie, each time this is marked by her crossing bodies of water (so often in the history of the Western genre such crossings become symbolic of travelling across borders, both literal and metaphoric). However, the argument that *True Grit* is in fact more strongly remediating *Through the Looking-Glass* than Carroll's earlier fantasy is confirmed by the inclusion of reversed characters in the Coen brothers' film as highlighted above.

As Alice thinks about travelling through the looking-glass, she explains to her cat that the land inside the mirror is just like this one, 'only the things go the other way.'[585] This is the perfect encapsulation of how the Coen brothers have presented their *True Grit*. Images, like the appearance of Cogburn, have been changed in appearance from the novel and 1969 film. In fact, they have been reversed (as if Mattie has also entered the reflected world of the looking-glass), not only differentiating it from other versions of the Western, making it a reimagining, but also creatively amalgamating their story with other sources, fulfilling the process of remediation. Throughout the film, it is not just the appearance of characters which is reversed, compositions of entire shots are routinely presented as though through a looking-glass.

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[584] Shone.
[585] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), p. 171.

One of the earliest examples of this process of reversing comes in the courtroom scene, which introduces Cogburn. The Marshall, giving evidence, sits on the judge's right-hand side.[586]

Figure 113 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

During the corresponding scene in Hathaway's film, however, the witness stand lies on the opposite side of the judge's bench.[587]

[586] *True Grit* (2010).
[587] *True Grit* (1969).

Figure 114 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (1969)

Similarly, when Mattie, pistol in hand, confronts Chaney at a creek, the Coen brothers' completely invert the framing of the scene. In the 1969 film, Hathaway captures Mattie on the right side of the screen, close and in focus, with Chaney further away and out of focus.[588]

[588] Ibid.

Figure 115 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (1969)

In the 2010 film though, Mattie appears on the left with Chaney to the right of screen. Both characters are in focus and at a relative middle distance to the camera, in an extreme long shot.[589]

Figure 116 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

[589] *True Grit* (2010).

More than just a simple visual change, a reversal of the composition of the entire shot, here the Coen brothers have completely altered the balance and effect of the confrontation. In the 1969 film there are horses between Mattie and Chaney, whilst the scenery and location also vie for attention, diverting focus away from the central conflict. In comparison, the Coen brothers' vision of this shot features the protagonist, the antagonist, and little else. Gone are the horses, and gone is the rocky nature of the creek, replaced by knee-high water. The camera is tighter to the action, eliminating any distracting bursts of colour from the sky. Whilst even the trees seem to grow in uniformity, unlike in Hathaway's film where they are jutting out. This in effect not only reverses the scene's composition, but also redresses the balance of the battle. Fittingly for the Coen brothers' film, their framing and the exclusion of any extraneous details and scenery, refocuses this confrontation as a standoff between good and evil. This not only aligns with one of the overriding themes of their film, but it is also more in keeping with those of Portis' novel than anything in Hathaway's *True Grit* comes close to.

These instances where the composition of shots is reversed not only further support the view that the Coen brothers' *True Grit* is a creative product of remediative filmmaking. They also demonstrate that the film is a new adaptation of the original novel, as the further remediation of two Carroll fantasies in various ways also establishes that this *True Grit* is more suitably thought of as a reimagining of it. A film which amalgamates the themes and images of various periods, genres and sources with the Coen brothers' own thematic preoccupations (like the notions of good versus evil and types of masculinity, explored here through a lack of heroism, cowardice, and the fact that the focus of the film is not a man but a young girl) in an original final product. However, the Coen brothers' take on Mattie's adventure also includes images which suggest that they have once again, at least partially, taken inspiration from *The Night of the Hunter*.

Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

The influence of Laughton's film can be found throughout the Coen brothers' canon. Indeed, this thesis has already identified its impact on *The Big Lebowski*, *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *No Country for Old Men*. In their readaptation of *True Grit*, however, the influence of *The Night of the Hunter* is more overt than in

each of those earlier films. Whilst the argument of its role in shaping *True Grit* will return to the battle between good and evil in due course, it is prudent to open this analysis with what is the strongest connection between the two films.

The most memorable moments in Laughton's film revolve around the hymn 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms'. It becomes Powell's theme, haunting the screen and following the children as relentlessly as the man himself. Heard throughout the film, the song becomes increasingly important, eventually framing the climatic stand-off between the devilish Preacher and the saintly Rachel Cooper, who, diametrically opposes Powell by significantly opting to 'Lean on Jesus'.[590] The use of the hymn here connotes the struggle between the forces of good and evil, but in a more general sense *The Night of the Hunter*, and specifically 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', provides inspiration for the Coen brothers' *True Grit*. This is a view supported by Jeff Smith in his analysis of the film's soundtrack, as he equates it with two of their other films, noting that

> The inclusion of [...] hymns is motivated by *True Grit*'s treatment of biblical themes of retribution and grace; yet they also recall the inclusion of gospel music in the soundtrack for both *O Brother* and *The Ladykillers*. More to the point, though, the inclusion of 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' also serves as an allusion to a Coens [favourite], *The Night of the Hunter*.[591]

Indeed, although there is a definite kinship between other Coen brothers' films and Laughton's dark fable, the connection between *True Grit* and *The Night of the Hunter* is more tangible than the other times the earlier film was remediated in their own works.

The opening chords of 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' can be heard immediately in *True Grit*, as it plays over the epigraph of the film. Just as the biblical verse, 'The wicked flee when none pursueth' (itself evidence that this is a new adaptation of Portis' novel as this proverb is not included in the 1969 film), looms over the entire film as Mattie pursues Chaney, so too does the hymn haunt it in much the same way. Burwell's score continuously reprises 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', with the hymn becoming an almost guiding presence to the

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[590] *The Night of the Hunter*.
[591] Jeff Smith, 'O Brother, Where Chart Thou?: Pop Music and the Coen Brothers', in *Popular Music and the New Auteur: Visionary Filmmakers After MTV*, ed. by Arved Ashby (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 129-157 (p. 152).

action, the same function that is served by the opening biblical verse. Yet, the treatment of ‘Leaning on the Everlasting Arms’ serves a more remediative purpose than just forming the soundtrack, its inclusion actively recalls *The Night of the Hunter*.

In *True Grit*, the hymn remains merely instrumental on the score until the final scene, where a now forty-year-old Mattie (Elizabeth Marvel) stands at the grave of her hero Cogburn reflecting on the story.[592] Here, the song is finally given a full platform, lyrics and all. It is at this point that it becomes clear that ‘Leaning on the Everlasting Arms’ is not just a part of the score, it is Mattie. The hymn has become her signature theme, guiding the character and the audience through the story. This realisation is where the true connection between the two films is ultimately established. In *The Night of the Hunter* the hymn becomes Powell’s signature theme, but also the theme for the entire film, just as it adopts the same role for Mattie and *True Grit* as a whole.

The use of ‘Leaning on the Everlasting Arms’ in *True Grit* is down to indirect remediation. This is exemplified through the realisation that the film has essentially reversed the dynamic of the pursuit which drives the story, suggesting that this musical remediation has (like those visual ones noted above) also been filtered through the influence of *Through the Looking-Glass*, imbuing it with a reflected significance, becoming a symbol of good rather than the theme for evil it was in Laughton’s film. During the second half of *The Night of the Hunter*, Powell relentlessly hunts down the children, chasing them across the land up until the climax where his lust for the hidden money sees him hang.[593] Here, evil hunts down the good in Powell’s fruitless quest, but in *True Grit* it is the pure, in the form of Mattie, along with the good and the dubious, LaBoeuf (Matt Damon) and Cogburn respectively, who pursues villainy, in the guise of Chaney, across borders and into foreign territory. The Coen brothers, however, offer a more nuanced ending than a formulaic one where good triumphs over evil. Chaney does meet his fate at Mattie’s hands, but it also costs her. Not only does she now have blood on her hands, but the fatal shot she delivers to Chaney lands her in a snake pit, resulting in her losing an arm, giving the film’s recurring musical theme a bitterly ironic role, and as the

[592] *True Grit* (2010).
[593] *The Night of the Hunter*.

conclusion shows, twenty-six years later Mattie is all alone.[594] Unable to move on from her adventure, Mattie is not given the happy ending afforded to the Harper children in *The Night of the Hunter*. Whilst they get a new start with Mrs Cooper and the other orphans, Mattie is left physically and mentally scarred by her encounter with evil and her own desire for revenge, reflecting on the way in which 'Time just gets away from us.'

When they discussed the influence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Joel commented that when Mattie crosses the river into the Indian territory, the story 'becomes weirder and weirder, pushing it more towards a [fairy tale] thing, [like it does in] *The Night of the Hunter*, in the sense of the landscape becoming more self-consciously poetic.'[595] This suggests that both of these sources were remediated and amalgamated in *True Grit* to enhance its expressionistic and fantastical qualities. *The Night of the Hunter* stretches the definitions of the film noir and the Southern Gothic genre, adopting an increasingly fantastical quality as Powell chases the children across the land. In fact, as his pursuit extends beyond the Harper house, the film becomes an almost nightmarish fairy tale. As the children flee across a river, there is a procession of nature shots, including a toad and a spider's web, illustrating the predator/prey relationship of the chase. Later, whilst the children take refuge in a barn, the ambient sounds of nature are replaced by Powell singing 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' as he somehow tracks them to this faraway place. In a storybook-like aesthetic, he is seen riding across the horizon in silhouette.[596]

[594] *True Grit* (2010).
[595] Shone.
[596] *The Night of the Hunter*.

Figure 117 - Screenshot from *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

This visual bears a striking similarity to two separate scenes in the Coen brothers' film. Firstly, in the prologue, Mattie discusses her father's murder. She did not witness these events, so the images are purely a representation of how she imagines the action unfolded. Consequently, the figures are depicted as shadows, which imbues the entire scene with a certain illustrated quality, like it had been found in a storybook.[597]

[597] *True Grit* (2010).

Figure 118 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

Figure 119 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

In the second example, after Cogburn has freed Mattie from the pit, she begins to succumb to the snake venom, meaning she flits in and out of consciousness. With this, the film once again adopts a fairy tale-like aesthetic as time jumps forward intermittently with her awareness. In this sequence there is even a shot of Cogburn

and the injured Mattie riding across the horizon in silhouette, closely matching the shot of Powell from Laughton's film.[598]

Figure 120 - Screenshot from *True Grit* (2010)

These examples clearly highlight that through its remediation of both Carroll and *The Night of the Hunter*, the Coen brothers' *True Grit* has evolved beyond mere adaptation, becoming a reimagining of the story: a kind of metaphysical fairy tale which accentuates the more fantastical elements of the novel.

Indeed, according to the Coen brothers, their *True Grit* should not even be considered as a Western in the classical sense.[599] Instead, they thought that the 'perfectly smart thing to do [...] was for it to appeal to a broader demographic [...] a story told by a 14-year-old girl that might be interesting for a 14-year-old girl to see.'[600] This is their own version of a family film, and also, because of its release date and its wintry imagery, 'a Christmas movie'.[601] The decision to frame this 'family-friendly' story in a wintry setting, adds to the lyrical fairy tale quality they aspired to, creating both a Carroll-like fantasy, and a somewhat ironic Christmas

[598] Ibid.
[599] Lawrence.
[600] Shone.
[601] Ibid.

film. The wintry vistas and recurring snowy imagery of the film generates an other-worldly atmosphere, which in addition to the unlikely adventures of Mattie and her companions, intensifies the fairy tale quality of the film. Almost supernaturally, the snow seems to get heavier the further into the Indian territory, or down the rabbit hole, they go. Yet, as well as reinforcing the fairy tale credentials of their *True Grit*, the choice to feature wintry weather heavily also reaffirms that this is a new adaptation of the original novel.

As I have shown, the Coen brothers return to Portis' novel, but also periodically recall the 1969 film (although not in the sense of a remake). As well as this though, the film also strongly evokes *The Night of the Hunter*. The Coen brothers have, however, also drastically shifted the tone of their film, so much so in fact that their *True Grit* may not even be a Western anymore. Instead, using a remediative and amalgamative approach to adaptation, they have focused on the more fantastical elements of the original novel, like the fact that a fourteen-year-old girl undertakes this adventure, evolving it into their own version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, creating a Coen brothers' fairy tale. By remediating several elements into their story (original novel, previous adaptation, classic film noir and fairy tale) and amalgamating them together with their own creative vision, they have managed to transcend the idea of the remake, delivering a reimagining of *True Grit*. This process also allows the Coen brothers to readdress popular perceptions of the history of the American West. Unlike in many Hollywood productions, it was not a period or landscape where heroes were uniformly good or successful. As Mattie's journey shows, things were not as black-and-white as popular culture would like you to believe; as put in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* when discussing the difference between truth and perception in an understanding of frontier history: 'This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.'[602]

Mississippi via Ealing

Before *True Grit*, even before *No Country for Old Men* for that matter, the Coen brothers undertook another adaptation of sorts. More like the amalgamative remediations seen in their early filmmaking, *The Ladykillers* is harder to classify

[602] *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, dir. by John Ford (Paramount Pictures, 1962).

than any of their other films. Unlike *True Grit*, it would be incorrect to consider their *The Ladykillers* as a new adaptation, as there was only the original film to draw upon. Released by Ealing Studios in 1955, with a story and screenplay by William Rose and a post-war London setting, Mackendrick's *The Ladykillers* sees a gang of five criminals led by Professor Marcus (Alec Guinness) pose as a string quintet so that they can gain access to the house of Mrs Wilberforce (Katie Johnson), an elderly widow, and use it as their base for a daring robbery of King's Cross train station.[603]

The Coen brothers alter (indirectly remediate) elements from this premise for their telling of the story. Now taking place in 1990s Mississippi, the leader of the titular gang is Professor Goldthwait Higginson Dorr (Tom Hanks), whilst the ensemble poses as a band who play the 'music of the Renaissance' with period instruments. The widow becomes Mrs Munson, whose basement is the perfect staging point for the robbery of a casino vault.[604] There are unquestionably strong similarities between the two films, which is why many critics view the film as a simple remake, almost unanimously dismissed as a low point in the Coen brothers' career.[605] In a contemporary review for *The Guardian*, Bradshaw remarked: 'The Coen brothers have given us the most perplexing oddity of their career, a weirdly pointless remake of the 1955 Ealing classic, transplanted from [post-war] London to the modern Deep South.'[606] Based on a single viewing, and with no critical interaction with their wider filmmaking style or theories of remediation, a dismissal of *The Ladykillers* is understandable. The film, however, benefits from repeat viewings and an acknowledgement of the remediative nature and value of every one of the Coen brothers' films. In his review though, Christopher Orr does not consider this. Following a repeat viewing, he wrote, matter-of-factly, 'Welcome to the bottom of the trough [...] by a substantial margin, the worst movie the Coen brothers have ever made [...] a broad, slack, grating farce that bears little

[603] *The Ladykillers*, dir. by Alexander Mackendrick (Ealing Studios, 1955).
[604] *The Ladykillers* (2004).
[605] Jenny M. Jones, *The Big Lebowski: An Illustrated, Annotated History of the Greatest Cult Film of All Time* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2012), p. 200.
[606] Peter Bradshaw, '*The Ladykillers*', *The Guardian*, Friday 25th June 2004, http://www.theguardian.com/film/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,,1246445,00.html [date accessed: 24th September 2015].

resemblance to the understated original – [a failure] completely out of character.'[607] However, remembering that their filmmaking continually utilises remediation, their *The Ladykillers* should not be compared with Mackendrick's film, a mere remake.

Those who judge the film negatively justify their stance by pointing to the fact that, just as with the often lamented *Intolerable Cruelty*, the Coen brothers were initially just hired as scriptwriters, stepping in to direct when their past collaborator Barry Sonnenfeld dropped out.[608] However, this would not explain how the finished film turned out, as their scripts closely follow the films which are produced. Moreover, it is apparent how influential the original film was to them, as in their debut, *Blood Simple*, they feature the line 'Who looks stupid now?' This is a direct quotation from the Mackendrick film, and is also included in their own interpretation of *The Ladykillers*.[609] The Coen brothers only remediate sources which have inspired them, and the fact that the 1955 film is directly quoted in their first feature shows that they would not choose to simply 'remake such a fine film.' This consideration is why their version of *The Ladykillers* does not fit the traditional mould of the remake. Admittedly, in the strictest sense, a remake involves making something again, even if transforming it. In a cinematic sense though, to class *The Ladykillers* in this way is inappropriate, as it is clearly a reimagining. Through the practice of creative remediation, their film moves beyond the realm of the remake. As Doom stated: 'the Coens' first full-fledged remake of an existing film isn't much of a remake. Ethan explains, "We really like the original movie. It's a strong story premise [...] [so] [w]e ripped out the spine of it, kept that and threw out everything else."'[610] Bearing this in mind then, it makes sense to consider the Coen brothers' *The Ladykillers* not in the terms of the remake or adaptation, but rather, as with their *True Grit*, as a fundamental reimagining of the story.

In fact, their version of *The Ladykillers* actually represents another remediative amalgamation. Like *Miller's Crossing*, *The Big Lebowski* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*, the film is a remediation, which uses the Mackendrick film as

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[607] Christopher Orr, '30 Years of Coens: *The Ladykillers*', *The Atlantic*, 22nd September 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/09/30-years-of-coens-the-ladykillers/380530/ [date accessed: 15th February 2016].
[608] Rowell, p. 340.
[609] Ibid, p. 340.
[610] Doom, p. 139.

its primary influence, but alters it in a way which serves their story. This can be illustrated by examining 'the spine' of the original film kept by the Coen brothers. Their film retains the imagery of the original, albeit with the barges of Mississippi replacing the trains of London, including, notably, the daytime setting of the heist, the characterisation of key players and the final outcome. As noted by Doom in summary though, it is 'the Coen additions [which] give birth to an entire new movie body with an American slant.'[611] By remediating just 'the spine' of the Mackendrick film alongside various other sources, they have been able to create a film which is deeply influenced by the original, but different in enough ways to ensure its standing as a separate creative entity and not simply a regurgitation of the Ealing classic.

'Come to the professor.'

This is displayed in the film's many recollections of a variety of other sources; *The Ladykillers* is not just *The Ladykillers*. It remediates other influences just as routinely as the Ealing film, including *Sullivan's Travels*, as shown through one of the major recurring motifs of *The Ladykillers*, the large portrait of Mrs Munson's dead husband. Othar (in the likeness of Maurice Watson) dominates the front room of the house, silently watching events unfold. The painting is prominent before the Professor arrives, wearing a detached expression. However, the depiction of Othar is seen at regular intervals throughout the film, and each time it is seen, a different expression is offered; his features reflecting the most recent plot developments.[612]

[611] Ibid, p. 139.
[612] *The Ladykillers* (2004).

Figure 121 - Screenshot from *The Ladykillers* (2004)

Figure 122 - Screenshot from *The Ladykillers* (2004)

On several occasions the portrait displays various quizzical, even judgemental, looks, as he silently passes judgement, perhaps guiding the reactions of the audience, on the titular gang. The most notable, and hilarious, example comes

when, in an attempt to clear the tunnel they are digging for their heist by using dynamite, Pancake accidentally triggers it early, rocking the house and blowing off his finger. Cutting to the painting, the camera finds Othar hanging crookedly, the blast having shaken him from the wall. Reflecting his own precarious position, as well as the progress of the robbers, Othar has assumed a gape of shock at this turn of events.[613]

Figure 123 - Screenshot from *The Ladykillers* (2004)

This could easily be a comic nod to the 'living' portrait in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), but as Rowell states, 'Othar's portrait changes expressions, adding silly commentary to the ongoing action, a la the portrait in *Sullivan's Travels*.'[614]

In Sturges' film, Sully takes lodging with two spinsters whilst researching *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*. In his room hangs a painting of a late male relation, Joseph. Whereas Othar's constantly changing portrait is a recurring image in *The Ladykillers* though, the picture of Joseph is featured in just one scene of the earlier film, presented on several occasions during this passage, displaying a slightly

[613] Ibid.
[614] Rowell, p. 336.

different expression each time, depending on what the women are planning to do to Sully.[615]

Figure 124 - Screenshot from *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)

Figure 125 - Screenshot from *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)

[615] *Sullivan's Travels*.

Although the painting does not change its expression as overtly as the one in *The Ladykillers* does, and despite remaining fixed to the wall throughout, it is clear that a relatively small visual joke from *Sullivan's Travels* has been remediated into the Coen brothers' film. This is of significant remediative value, as it once again calls back to the influence of Sturges on the Coen brothers, especially *Sullivan's Travels*, whose protagonist is researching his new film about Depression-era America. Illustrating that their *The Ladykillers* is not just a simple remake of the Ealing film, but rather an amalgamous remediation, which allows them to reimagine a film which inspired them.

Their decision to only adopt certain elements of the structure and plot of Mackendrick's *The Ladykillers* into their own reimagining of the story also allows for a more significant alteration. The 2004 film relocates the action from the post-war London setting of the Ealing film to the banks of the Mississippi river circa 1998: 'Thirty years after Martin Luther King! In the age of Montel!'[616] This facilitates the biggest change between the two films, namely in both style and genre. Whilst the earlier film is a comedy, albeit with some dark themes, above all else, it is very British in its humour and sensibilities. In contrast, the Coen brothers' film is (despite the view of Adams who dismisses it as being merely a 'light comedy')[617] a hybrid; a remediation which incorporates multiple different styles, to the point where it becomes difficult to classify it as belonging to just one particular genre. There is humour, with the physical comedy often venturing into the realms of Slapstick and Screwball, but to define the 2004 film as a simple comedy because of this is to ignore substantial parts of its makeup. The film takes place in Saucier, Mississippi, and the associations of this setting, the imagery, dialogue, characterisation, and cultural implications of the film, transform this *The Ladykillers* into a Southern Gothic work, a remediation of its tradition.

David Punter and Glennis Byron offer the following definition of this subgenre of the Gothic tradition. In literature, the Southern Gothic 'appropriates elements of the traditional Gothic, combines them with the particular concerns of the American South, and is [characterised] by an emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre and, very often, the violent, investigating madness, decay and despair,

[616] *The Ladykillers* (2004).
[617] Adams, p. 197.

and the continuing pressures of the past upon the present.'[618] This definition could also be applied to *The Ladykillers*, as it seems to capture both the tone and spirit of the Coen brothers' creative remediation, and whilst Punter and Byron only refer to the Southern Gothic tradition in literature, it is worth noting that this subgenre has been successfully transformed into a distinct branch of cinema.

The Southern Gothic translates to screens in a variety of ways. R. Bruce Brasell describes four different Hollywood interpretations of 'the Southern', of which the Southern Gothic is one, and the concept of the 'southern "sense of place."[619] It may be more suitable, however, to focus on Punter and Byron's general definition of the tradition, as cinema has offered a variety of interpretations on the Southern Gothic. In his article, Brasell identifies Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) as a prime example of this film movement. However, it is worth noting that Mulligan's adaptation shares little in common stylistically with two of the most recognisable films belonging to this subgenre. John Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967) is most assuredly a 'Southern', but it is filmed using a filter, meaning that the entire film possesses a strangely unsettling gold tint.[620] Meanwhile, *The Night of the Hunter* is presented in black-and-white like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, the respective subject matter and visual style of the two films could not be more different. In fact, *The Night of the Hunter* strays into film noir territory, evoking a Southern Gothic noir atmosphere, a hybrid aesthetic also identifiable in *The Ladykillers*. As this demonstrates, no single visual style can summarise the cinema of the Southern Gothic alone. The essence of the genre is instead derived from setting and plot. This means that *The Ladykillers*, despite its comic roots, also belongs to the Southern Gothic tradition because the Coen brothers' chose to make it so by changing the setting and themes. This is achieved through their use of remediation, explaining why no-one else seems to have described it in this way, as no other critical thinkers associate the Coen brothers with remediative filmmaking, and therefore dismiss *The Ladykillers* as a remake of

[618] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 116-117.
[619] R. Bruce Brasell, 'Humid Time: Independent Film, Gay Sexualities, and Southernscapes', in *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, ed. by Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), pp. 293-316 (p. 298).
[620] *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, dir. by John Huston (Warner Brothers, 1967).

little value. However, the process of remediation, aside from ensuring that this is a reimagining, is what gives the film creative and critical value.

As well as evoking the Southern Gothic tradition though, the Coen brothers further differentiate their film through the remediation of Americana. As Doom notes, 'the Coens perform at their best when engrossed in Americana'.[621] Their knowledge and fondness for Americana blends with the Southern Gothic style to shape the characterisation of the Professor. As Matt Zoller Seitz attests, Dorr is a 'criminal mastermind [...] [and] a pretentious dandy who dresses like Colonel Sanders and talks like a cross between James Lipton and Wile E. Coyote.'[622] The combination of these inspirations certainly points to the Professor being an amalgamous creation. However, the key influence for the character, which sees Americana meld with the Southern Gothic tradition, is the poet Edgar Allan Poe. Roger Ebert acknowledged that the Professor is channelling Poe alongside Tennessee Williams, another figurehead of Southern Americana.[623] In her study of gothic forms, Deborah Mutch links Poe with 'dark gothic qualities, as well as with 'the southern landscape in general.'[624]

Whilst the Professor may be an amalgamation of various sources, it is through the influence of Poe that he truly becomes a Southern Gothic character. Not only is he presented as a caricature of Poe himself, a southern 'dandy' in a sharp suit, but in typical fashion for the Coen brothers, the character fully embraces the absurdity of the situation when he admits: 'I just love, love, love the works of Mr Edgar Allan Poe.' Despite his supposed appreciation of the poet, however, the Professor is nothing but a fraud. On three separate occasions, the Professor delivers a Poe poem, yet each time he recites the same ode. Making it worse, 'To Helen' (1831), the poem which he repeatedly recites, only comprises fifteen lines, creating the impression that this is the only Poe verse which he bothered to learn for his trip to Mississippi. Whilst a contextual argument could be made for 'To

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[621] Doom, p. 139.
[622] Matt Zoller Seitz, 'Chaos and Repair: Reclaiming *The Ladykillers*', *Press Play*, 26th March 2013, http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/in-defense-of-the-ladykillers [date accessed: 16th March 2016].
[623] Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Movie Yearbook 2007* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2007), p. 391.
[624] Deborah Mutch, *The Modern Vampire and Human Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 165.

Helen' as an appropriate choice for the first two readings, with its hauntingly romantic air certainly in keeping with the front room and its shrine to Othar, the Professor's lack of Poe knowledge is definitely on display during the final reading.

Following a series of calamities and double-crosses, the Professor is the only member of the gang left alive. Standing on the bridge atop the Mississippi river where the bodies are disposed of, he has all the money to himself. In his moment of self-congratulation, the Professor, perhaps fittingly, begins to recite the final stanza of 'To Helen' when he spots a raven flying past. Instead of seeing this as a cue to quote Poe's most famous creation, the Professor proceeds with his recital, finally reaching the end of the romantic ode for the first time in the entire film. However, in a touch of irony, typical of the Coen brothers and matching the tone of the climax of their later reimagining of *True Grit*, the spirit of Poe takes revenge on the character butchering his words, as the raven he had seen as a sign of blessing, knocks loose a gargoyle's head, which strikes the Professor. The blow sends him over the bridge, where he is tangled and choked to death by his own cape.[625] In this final scene, the Professor becomes the victim of the influences from which he was created, perhaps suggesting that constant remediation can also be detrimental (as it has seen the Coen brothers constantly labelled as mere imitators). Poe, as a raven, dislodges a gargoyle, a Southern Gothic grotesque, leading to Dorr's strangulation by his unnecessary attire, the symbol of the character's roots as a Southern dandy. Indeed, with all of these influences from Americana and the Southern Gothic, especially Poe, shaping, and eventually killing, the character, one wonders how Rowell can claim that the Coen brothers' Professor has been 'Modelled after *The Ladykillers*' original professor.'[626] It seems fruitless in the face of this evidence to continue suggesting that they have in any way simply remade the Ealing film, their film is clearly a reimagining.

The Professor from the Coen brothers' film is almost assuredly not a real man of learning. Whilst his pomposity and repetition of the same Poe poem may not conclusively prove this, a further argument regarding his fraudulent identity can be made by looking to the 1955 film. Here, Professor Marcus is presented as nothing more than a bank robber. This is clearly signposted when his 'string quintet'

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[625] *The Ladykillers* (2004).
[626] Rowell, p. 336.

are first introduced. Unaware of the intricacies of the planned heist, and having been introduced to Mrs Wilberforce as Mr Robinson, Harry (Peter Sellers) enquires: 'Here, what's all this about, Doc?' Marcus then clarifies that it is 'Not Doc this time, Harry', suggesting that on a past job, the Professor has been a Doctor, and that his academic title is simply an alias used to grant him access to the house.[627]

By extension, it logically follows that the Professor in the Coen brothers' film is also a fraud, using an assumed title in order to gain access to Mrs Munson's home. This is hardly unexpected, however, this realisation can also lead to another influential source which has been remediated into the design of the film. One of the possibilities arising from the Professor's identity fraud connects him to Powell from *The Night of the Hunter*, a link noticed by Seitz, who described the Professor as an obvious 'devil figure [...] [in the mould of] Robert Mitchum's preacher'.[628] A religious maniac and hypocrite, Powell travels the country cosying up to widows, before taking their money and murdering them. Powell gains the trust of these women by introducing himself as a Preacher. However, he is a self-appointed man of God, who is simply a psychopathic fanatic.[629] Powell poses as a Preacher in order to gain access to wealthy widows, in much the same way as it appears that the pompous Dorr assumes the guise of the Professor in order to achieve his goal. In the 2004 film of *The Ladykillers*, the Professor's position is neither confirmed nor denied, unlike in the Ealing Studios' version where Marcus' title is clearly false. Instead, the decision to leave their Professor's true identity a mystery more closely recalls the role of Powell in *The Night of the Hunter*, and its influence is recalled throughout, especially through imagery.

Admittedly, some of the aesthetic similarities between the two films are attributable to the Southern setting and the associated style. However, one particular example specifically shows how the Coen brothers fully remediated *The Night of the Hunter* in their film, namely Mrs Munson's root cellar. In the Mackendrick film, Marcus and his cronies gather, hatch their plan, and stash their loot in the spare bedroom rented to him by Mrs Wilberforce.[630] Such a fundamental

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627 *The Ladykillers*, (1955).
628 Seitz.
629 *The Night of the Hunter*.
630 *The Ladykillers* (1955).

element, any simple remake would, presumably, have to incorporate this setting into its structure. Yet, underlining its status as a reimagining, the 2004 *The Ladykillers* changes the location of the crew's adopted lair. Instead of congregating in his rented room, the Professor manages to convince his new landlady to let his ensemble gather in her root cellar to practice their music. It is in this basement that the gang's nefarious plans take shape, and later unravel, with the cellar itself acting as a route through to the casino money they are going to steal.[631] In their reimagining, the Coen brothers have altered a principal dynamic of the Mackendrick film, so that Mrs Munson's root cellar, rather than the rented room, becomes one of the primary settings in their film. The decision to shift the action from the bedroom to the root cellar creates another direct link between their reimagining and *The Night of the Hunter*, which also prominently features a basement.

In Laughton's film, John and Pearl Harper flee to the root cellar of the house to try and hide from Powell. Following his murder of their mother, the children are the only obstacle between Powell and the money the family is hiding, but in the root cellar he gets more than he bargained for. When John tells him that the money is buried under a stone in the cellar, Powell takes the children down to the cellar, holding John at knifepoint when he discovers that he has lied to him. When Pearl confesses that 'It's in my doll', Powell relents, only for John to collapse a shelf of glass jars on him, allowing the children to escape.[632] Here, as in the Coen brothers' film, a cellar becomes the setting for a key passage. In *The Night of the Hunter* the basement is the first location where good bests evil and sees Powell's first major defeat in his quest for the money, and in *The Ladykillers*, the root cellar is also the location for many of the gang's failures.[633] If the Professor shares a connection with Powell, and the evidence strongly supports this, then it seems equally valid that Mrs Munson's root cellar, and its role in the plot developments, was influenced by the similarly dank key location in the Laughton film. This further strengthens the argument that *The Night of the Hunter* was a key source for their reimagining of *The Ladykillers*.

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631 *The Ladykillers* (2004).
632 *The Night of the Hunter*.
633 *The Ladykillers* (2004).

The final connection between these two films is a musical one, and also links back to the Coen brothers' *True Grit*. As noted above, some of the most memorable moments in the Laughton film revolve around 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', with the hymn becoming Powell's theme, haunting the screen and following the children as relentlessly as the man himself, eventually framing the climatic stand-off.[634] A similar spiritual conflict lies at the heart of *The Ladykillers* according to Seitz, who argues that the film 'contrasts good guys who believe in [...] a higher power and an eternal reward against fringe-dwelling bad guys who care for little besides money.'[635] In an early scene the camera focuses on Mrs Munson writing a cheque. The order is to pay a charitable contribution to Bob Jones University, the finest Bible school in the country. Mrs Munson's monthly donation of $5 makes her a self-proclaimed angel, in direct contrast to the 'devil figure' of the Professor, and whilst she fills out the cheque, she hums a snippet of 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', before being cut off by the band's arrival.[636] Given the other substantive connections between the two films, it stands to reason that the brief inclusion of 'Leaning on The Everlasting *Arms'* represents yet another instance where *The Night of the Hunter* was remediated in *The Ladykillers*.

This, alongside remediations of *Sullivan's Travels*, Poe and the Southern Gothic tradition, and a general sense of Americana, confirms that the Coen brothers' have not simply remade *The Ladykillers*, but have crafted a film which should, like their *True Grit*, be regarded as a reimagining. In both instances, this is achieved through the remediation of the original works, as well as of other influences. This is evidence that, by using remediative techniques, the Coen brothers have transcended ideas of the remake and adaptation. Instead, they have created two films which highlight their distinctive approach to filmmaking.

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634 *The Night of the Hunter*.
635 Seitz.
636 *The Ladykillers* (2004).

Chapter Seven - Anthologies of Remediation: Hail, Caesar! and The Ballad of Buster Scruggs

Having used remediative practices to address amalgamative filmmaking and to approach adaptation, the Coen brothers now seem to be employing it in another way in their two latest films. Both *Hail, Caesar!* and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* are anthology films (made-up of several 'individual' stories connected through themes, characters, or plot) and can also viewed as amalgams: thus in keeping with their wider canon. The former is a take on studio-era Hollywood history, amalgamating together both real and altered details of the lives and stories of various figures and scenarios from Classic Hollywood to create its own story. On the other hand, the latter combines classical Western influences alongside the Coen brothers' own philosophical ponderings, resulting in something both fresh and familiar. It could also be argued that *Hail, Caesar!*, with its transfiguration of Hollywood biographies, anecdotes, and caricatures, also takes the form of a remediative adaptation. Meanwhile, the fact that *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* was financed and released through the video-streaming platform Netflix opens new possible interpretations of remediative filmmaking, more closely related to the digital framework which Bolter and Grusin focused on in their original theory. Most interestingly though, both of these films see the Coen brothers remediating themselves. This has always been a facet of their filmmaking, in fact this thesis has highlighted several examples of this, including thematic, visual and musical recollections, but in these two films there is a constant and insistent remediation of their whole oeuvre; a type of introspective remediation. It is this new approach to creating films which is the primary focus of this chapter, beginning with an analysis of their seventeenth release.

'Here at Capitol Pictures…'

The most obvious way in which *Hail, Caesar!* remediates the Coen brothers' earlier films is in its geographical setting. The 1950s-set comedy tells the story of two days in the life and career of Eddie Mannix (Brolin), the Head of Physical Production (he handles PR, oversees the films and the stars, and runs the studio's Hollywood backlot) at the fictional film studio, Capitol Pictures. This is the same studio which the eponymous playwright (Turturro) finds himself writing for when he moves to

Hollywood in 1930 in *Barton Fink*. Whilst Fink is a creation based on the writer Clifford Odetts though, Mannix was a real person. In reality, Mannix was employed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and was a dubious figure with strong ties to the criminal underworld. Over a forty-year association with MGM he was linked with the cover-up of murders, hit-and-runs and rapes. According to Michael Riedel:

> Though Louis B. Mayer's name was on the MGM logo, Mannix (as general manager and later a vice president) ran the studio from the 1930s through the '50s […] Mannix and [Howard] Strickling, the studio publicist, had enormous power over MGM's stars. The two knew all the sordid secrets, which they could bury to head off a scandal, or leak to ruin a career.[637]

The Coen brothers' facsimile of Mannix, however, is the antithesis of this. Like the real 'fixer', their Mannix also has the studio's interests at heart, but, at the same time, he is also presented as a family man and a repentant Catholic, whose own Priest says he confesses too often. This alteration in character (a form of indirect remediation of reality) means that whilst he does cover up scandals, he never resorts to criminality. As a result, unlike the real Mannix, he never becomes truly reprehensible, he 'has dirty work to do, but he does it with dignity.'[638] By portraying Mannix in this way, the Coen brothers are not just skewing reality so that it better serves their story (having a sympathetic and relatable Mannix gives a focal point for this genre-crossing trip into 1950s Hollywood which would be lacking heart if he were as loathsome as the actual man), but also reflecting how MGM and the real Mannix wanted the public to see him; the friend to the stars who was in no way unsavoury. Their likeable and relatable Mannix also creates a link back to Fink, a seemingly typical man who gets sucked into the immoral and dangerous world of Hollywood.

Similarly, for this story the Coen brothers could have focused on any one of the real studios from the Classic Hollywood-era. After all, during *Hail, Caesar!* we see that the studio is making melodramas, Biblical epics, Westerns, Berkeley-style water ballets, and even musicals. These various productions suggest several real specific studios from Classic Hollywood (including MGM and the musical and

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[637] Michael Riedel, 'Meet the sleazebag agent who inspired the new Coen Bros. movie', *New York Post*, February 1st 2016, http://nypost.com/2016/02/01/meet-the-sleeze-bag-agent-who-inspired-the-new-coen-bros-movie/ [date accessed: 21st April 2017].
[638] Ibid.

Paramount and the Western), however, their Mannix works for Capitol Pictures. This seems to be an indirect remediation of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), as Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's film tells the (his)story of the similarly fictitious Monumental Pictures.[639] More importantly though, the use of Capitol Pictures opens the possibility that all of the Coen brothers' films are not just self-contained stories, but actually take place in a shared world; the Coenverse. This is because it is Capitol Pictures who bring Fink to Hollywood in *Barton Fink*, making this the strongest example of introspective remediation seen in their work to this point, as the inclusion of the same studio suggests that they are actively revisiting their past, as well as that of Hollywood itself, to open up new stories. This is also apparent at other times during the film.

One of the films being made at Capitol is a water ballet starring DeeAnna Moran (Johansson). As Dan Jolin notes, in this production DeeAnna is playing an 'Esther Williams-ish mermaid'.[640] As with the dream sequence in *The Big Lebowski*, this too is clearly designed to recall Berkeley. Aside from his dancing films like *42nd Street*, Berkeley was also known for his collaborations with Williams. A talented swimmer, she was signed up to Hollywood where Berkeley took her 'water ballets' and arranged them into a series of 'aqua-musicals'.[641] The link between these films and DeeAnna's is noted in Richard Brody's review. Writing for *The New Yorker*, Brody argues that the project possesses the same 'shimmery froth of a Busby Berkeley-like water-ballet musical'.[642]

Additionally, some of Berkeley's signature filmmaking techniques, the same ones seen in the *Gutterballs* dream sequence from *The Big Lebowski*, are also used for Capitol Pictures' water ballet. After DeeAnna is filmed below the water by a submerged camera in *Hail, Caesar!*, the scene cuts to an overhead crane shot of the pool. This mirrors the shot of Maude and her Valkyries seen in *Gutterballs*, whilst it also once again remediates one of Berkeley's own signature shots.[643]

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[639] *Singin' in the Rain*, dir. by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952).
[640] Dan Jolin, 'Hail, Caesar! Review', *Empire*, 29th February 2016, http://www.empireonline.com/movies/hail-caesar/review/ [date accessed: 10th September 2016].
[641] Lorrie Mack, *The Book of Dance* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2012), p. 103.
[642] Richard Brody, 'The Coen Brothers' Marvellous "Hail, Caesar!"', *The New Yorker*, February 3rd 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-coen-brothers-marvellous-hail-caesar [date accessed: 24th September 2016].
[643] *Hail, Caesar!*, dir. by Joel and Ethan Coen (Working Title Films, 2016).

Figure 126 - Screenshot from *Hail, Caesar!* (2016)

The overhead angle of the camera then captures an upward jet of water before this gives way to a ring of synchronised swimmers. In formation, these performers unmistakeably recall Berkeley's work, as well as the way the chorine formed a 'Ring of Fire' around Maude in the dreamscape from *The Big Lebowski*.[644]

[644] Ibid.

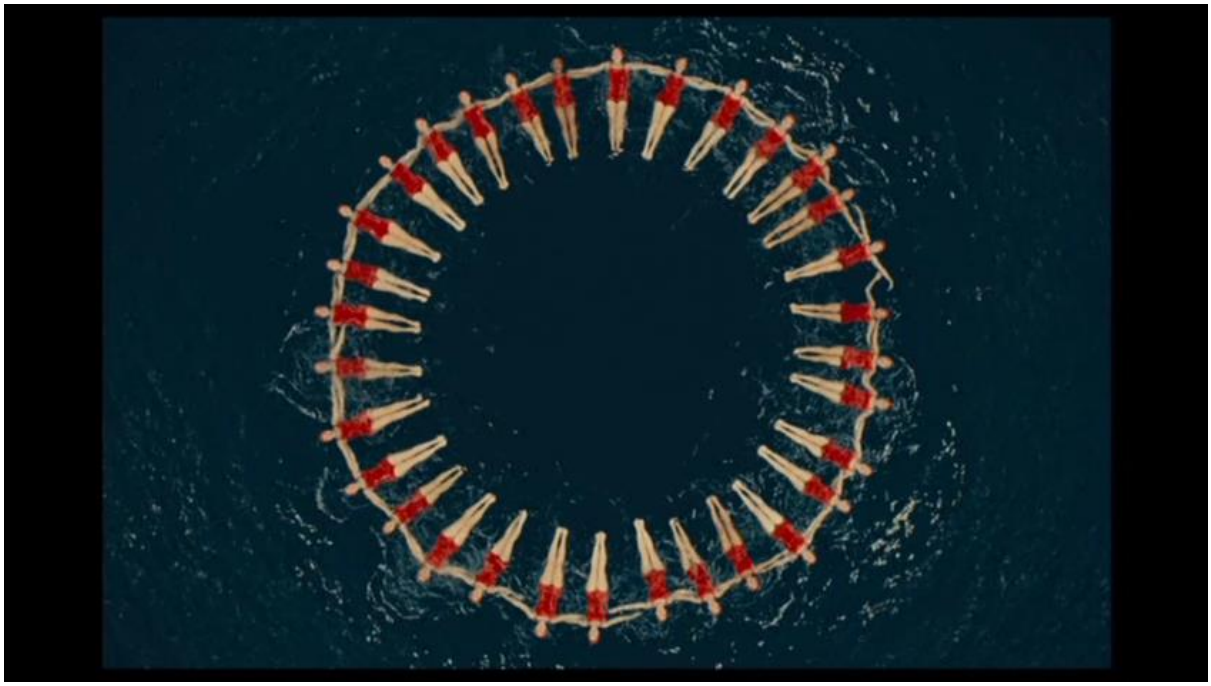

Figure 127 - Screenshot from *Hail, Caesar!* (2016)

Although this all appears to confirm that DeeAnna is the Coen brothers' Williams surrogate, things are not this simple. The water ballet Capitol are making is a prime example of their introspective remediation, as it not only utilises Berkeley's own filmmaking, and the idea of one of his frequent collaborators, it also unavoidably recalls *The Big Lebowski*. However, this is not just an introspective remediation, as the character of DeeAnna also represents another creative amalgamation.

Whilst she may be a pseudo-Williams in her screen persona, a virginal star whose films point to a certain Berkeley style, her personal life conforms with another real starlet of Classic Hollywood. DeeAnna has a problem, she has been divorced twice, and is now pregnant out of wedlock. She is 'pretty sure' who the father is and that he is not worth marrying to give the situation some legitimacy. This poses a potential PR disaster for Mannix. DeeAnna's films make money for the studio due to her wholesome image, and this scandal jeopardises said perception. Consulting a legal expert, Mannix concocts a plan where she will give the child up as soon as it is born, before then adopting it back so that it is not known that it is her own illegitimate offspring. This unsavoury solution is not needed after DeeAnna meets Joe Silverman (Jonah Hill), the bonded 'person' selected to take care of the baby in between its birth and adoption, and the two elope. Though the

plan is unused, it suggests that DeeAnna is in fact another Coen brothers amalgam. Her on screen persona may be a representation of Williams, but her personal life, including Mannix's role in the proposed adoption, points to her being a caricature of Loretta Young. A big star during the 1930s and 40s, Young became pregnant to Clark Gable during the filming of *Call of the Wild* (1935). In response: 'The real Eddie Mannix organised the deception whereby she adopted the resulting child as if it were an orphan.'[645] DeeAnna therefore is representing two different actresses from the real Classic Hollywood whose biographies and careers have been amalgamated by the Coen brothers to form an original character, as they have done throughout their films. In *Hail, Caesar!* though, this technique allows them to remediate Hollywood history and scandal without actually incriminating anyone, meaning that the film is perfectly serviceable without an understanding of Classic Hollywood. With knowledge and an exploration of the various forms of remediation in the film though, it becomes something of cultural and historical value.

A similar creative process and licence is also evident in the Coen brothers' presentation of one of Capitol Pictures' biggest stars. Burt Gurney (Channing Tatum) is seen filming an elaborate musical. He can sing and dance, and the project presents him as a sailor on shore leave, immediately calling to mind Donen and Kelly's *On the Town* (1949), as well as George Sidney's *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), both incidentally starring Kelly. His talents and persona clearly make Gurney the Coen brothers' Kelly surrogate, but with one major difference. Whilst the character of DeeAnna represents an amalgamation of at least two real Golden age Hollywood starlets, Gurney is more correctly seen as a form of indirect remediation of the real star, the Coen brothers presenting their own alternative version of Hollywood history. A defining facet of Hollywood's Golden age were the hearings into Communism and the hunt for Communists within the studio system. Fronted by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) under the remit of the House of Representatives, these 'witch-hunts' saw artists from in front of and behind the camera called to appear before the United States House of

[645] Alex von Tunzelmann, '*Hail, Caesar!* It's screwball comedy – who cares what really happened?', *The Guardian*, Friday 11th March 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/11/hail-caesar-coen-brothers-eddie-mannix-reel-history-josh-brolin-george-clooney [date accessed 23rd April 2017].

Representatives and figures such as Senator Joseph McCarthy. They were then expected to testify as to their own political persuasion, as well as naming anyone else in the industry they knew or suspected of being a Communist.

Kelly himself openly objected to this process, along with others (like Bogart and Huston) representing the 'Committee for the first Amendment', a 'non-political [organisation] campaigning only for honesty, fairness, and the accepted rights of any American citizen.'[646] This saw him eyed with suspicion by HUAC, leading him to openly state: 'I am not a Communist, never was a Communist, and have no sympathy with Communist activities […] The only line I know how to follow is the American line.'[647] This seems unequivocal, however, with their own version of Kelly, the Coen brothers' are clearly presenting a meditation on an alternate Hollywood, as well as a remediative commentary on the Communist paranoia of Classic Hollywood. For Gurney is a Communist, hosts a group of blacklisted writers (a thinly-veiled Coen take on the Hollywood Ten who were barred from the film industry following the HUAC hearings), has a dog called Engels (clearly named after Friedrich Engels who co-authored *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) with Karl Marx), and, in the film's most outlandish scene, even boards a Soviet submarine which rises off the coast of Hollywood so that he can defect to Moscow. Here, the Coen brothers are clearly using satire to create comedy, but they are also highlighting what remains one of the darkest times in Hollywood and wider American history. Even though the story they present is fictious, skewed from reality, it is also close enough to the truth to encourage further research and reflection from their audience.

There is undoubtedly a lot going on in *Hail, Caesar!*. For instance, the amalgamative remediation seen in the character of DeeAnna combines with the introspective remediation exemplified by the use of Capitol Pictures, alongside a further recollection of the not-as-innocent-as-she-looks nature of the character of Johansson's Birdy in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, to create what appears to be a wider remediation of the Coen brothers' entire canon. Whilst *The Big Lebowski* is

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[646] Jenni Avins, 'That time when "the Hollywood elite" took on Washington, 70 years ago', *Quartz*, February 25th 2017, https://qz.com/919067/how-it-looked-when-the-hollywood-elite-took-on-washington-70-years-ago/ [date accessed: 5th September 2019].
[647] Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 378.

recalled through the employment of Berkeley's style, it (as well as their other hard-boiled influenced films) is also brought to mind in the noir-like scenes where *Hail, Caesar!* is framed as a detective story. These passages also involve a kidnapping plot, introspectively connecting the film to *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo*, and again *The Big Lebowski*. The anthological nature of the film also results in it becoming an ensemble piece with multiple, interweaving story threads, recalling the structure of *Burn After Reading*. Finally, the religious imagery and theological debate glimpsed in *Hail, Caesar!* (the nature of different religions, who/what is Jesus/God?) shares similarities with the questioning of many of the Coen brothers' films, especially *A Serious Man*. Whilst the imagery of the Western evoked by Hobie Doyle (Alden Ehrenreich) recalls both *No Country for Old Men* and *True Grit*. Remediation through the amalgamation, alteration and adaptation of Hollywood history and stars' biographies has allowed *Hail, Caesar!* to be both familiar and fresh, to explore some serious subjects with humour, and opening up areas for further reflection for those viewers so inclined. By regularly recalling their own past, however, the Coen brothers are also extending their use of remediation into a new form. This suggests that they are accepting that they are now influential Hollywood filmmakers themselves, whose work will be remediated by a newer generation of artists. Meanwhile, the introspective remediation seen in this film is also a major part of their latest work.

'You're Buster Scruggs, the West Texas Twit?'

Whilst *Hail, Caesar!* is a remediation of Hollywood history and associated cultural politics (notably the Communist hysteria), offering glimpses of many different film styles and genres, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* sees the Coen brothers deliver another variant on the Western. Like their previous film though, this too takes the form of an anthology, but through its release on Netflix it also raises questions over the treatment of remediative filmmaking on digital platforms, where whole individual oeuvres and similar films can be accessed immediately; offering numerous rabbit holes down which to disappear. The film itself presents six seemingly individual shorts, each reflecting life, and death, on the American frontier. Interestingly, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* is initially presented as a collection of short stories.[648]

[648] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, dir. by Joel and Ethan Coen (Annapurna Pictures, 2018),

Figure 128 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

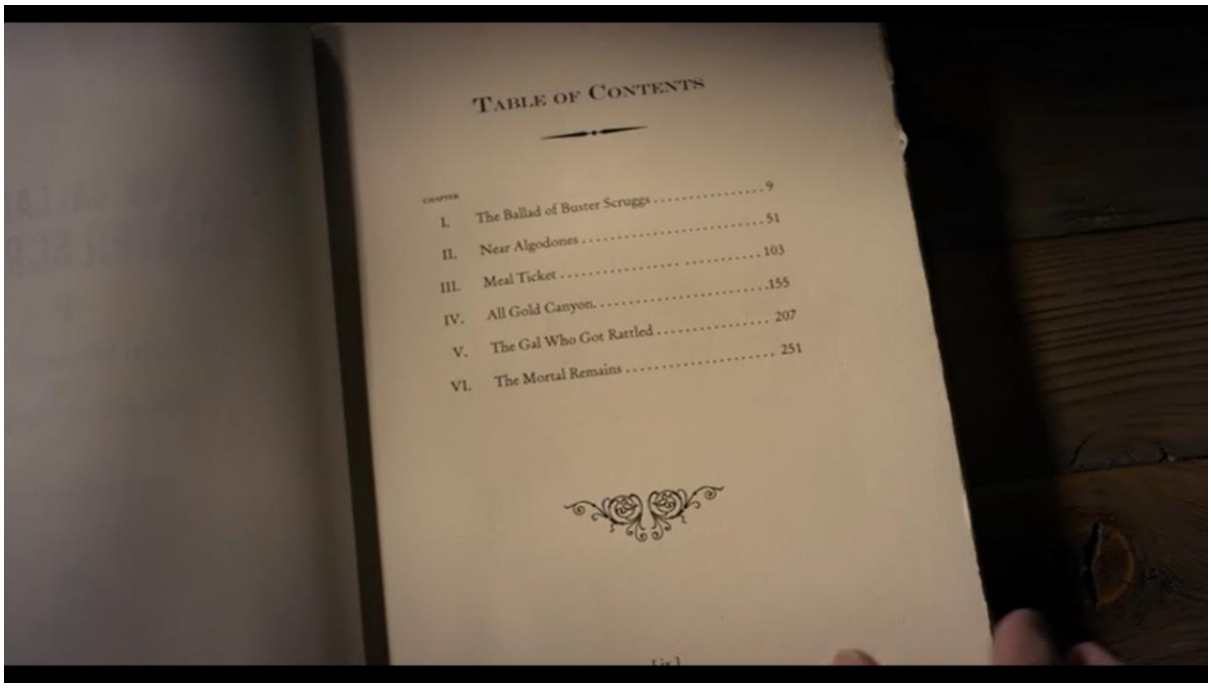

Figure 129 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

This presentation is itself a form of adaptation, as by framing their Western in this way, with each vignette portraying one of the stories from the collection, the Coen brothers are consciously remediating a classic trait in American Western literature. Many collections of such stories exist, such as Elmore Leonard's *Three-Ten to Yuma and Other Stories*. Originally published separately as short stories in the

1950s, this is a disparate collection of shorts, dominated by the titular tale which was adapted into Delmer Daves' *3:10 to Yuma* (1957). By presenting their film in this manner, the Coen brothers are not only remediating the tradition of such collections and their history of publication, they are also suggesting that, like some of their more recent films, this too is an adaptation.

Indeed, the fourth short, 'All Gold Canyon', is based on a Jack London story,[649] explaining why the film was nominated in the Best Adapted Screenplay category at the 2019 Academy Awards. However, whilst the film also recalls the cinematic history of the Western, with clear evocations of Fordian classicism and Leone's postmodern Spaghetti evolution, it does not belong to traditional adaptation. Instead, as with all their films, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* is an amalgamative remediation, which although influenced by various sources, is its own entity. Interestingly though, like *Hail, Caesar!* immediately before it, the film is also unmistakeably introspective, blending images and motifs from across their body of work to create a cinematic style distinctly Coenesque.

This is evident from the beginning of 'The Ballad of Buster Scruggs'. The titular story of the anthology concerns Buster Scruggs (Tim Blake Nelson), a cowboy known by many names including 'the San Saba Songbird'. This is because he travels the land on his horse, Dan, with his guitar. Throughout the short, Buster sings numerous songs. As a character he is, strangely enough, an introspective remediation of the previous film's Hobie, a singing cowboy. Hobie himself is a play on several actors who sang in 'classic' Westerns, but intriguingly, although made later, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* is set around 1873 (the date on the book). This means that in the singular universe of Coen brothers' films, Buster predates Hobie, suggesting that the introspective remediation goes both ways.

During his introductory song, there is a shot which sees the camera capture the view from inside Buster's guitar.[650]

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[649] Glenn Kenny, 'The Ballad of Buster Scruggs', RogerEbert.com, November 9th 2018, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-ballad-of-buster-scruggs-2018 [date accessed: 19th February 2019].
[650] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.

Figure 130 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

By itself an unusual shot, it is only on revisiting *The Big Lebowski* (which is easily achievable as it is one of the Coen brothers' films available on Netflix alongside *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*) that it is realised that this is also an introspective remediation. Utilised in the earlier film during the first dream sequence as a bowling ball rolls over the Dude, the camera assumes his point-of-view as he looks out from inside the ball.[651]

[651] *The Big Lebowski*.

Figure 131 - Screenshot from *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

This clear recollection of *The Big Lebowski* also leads to a more interesting possible connection. As with the above example of *Hail, Caesar!* and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, the use of this shot could point to a reciprocal introspective remediation, with Buster recalling the Stranger and vice-versa, perhaps explaining why Buster routinely breaks the fourth wall to address the audience, mirroring the Stranger's speeches to camera in the earlier film.

An earlier chapter also posited the theory that the Stranger is a ghost from the past, he is dead. This raises another striking similarity with Buster. During 'The Ballad of Buster Scruggs', Buster is seen easily dispatching any foe who challenges him, but when the Kid (Willie Watson) asks to duel, he barely gets a chance to wave the count before he 'trades his spurs for wings.'[652] The way in which Buster dies is also worthy of note. He is shot straight through the head, but instead of dropping dead immediately, he stands in puzzlement. He removes his hat and examines the clean entry and bloody exit holes left by the bullet, seemingly only feeling the effects of the gunshot when hatless. In conjunction with the events of 'Near Algodones', the second vignette, where Cowboy (James Franco) is knocked out and apprehended for bank robbery only after his hat is blown off by

[652] T*he Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.

the wind, this seems to be the Coen brothers' introspectively remediating the imagery of *Miller's Crossing*, whilst simultaneously confirming one of the theories regarding the significance of the hat.[653]

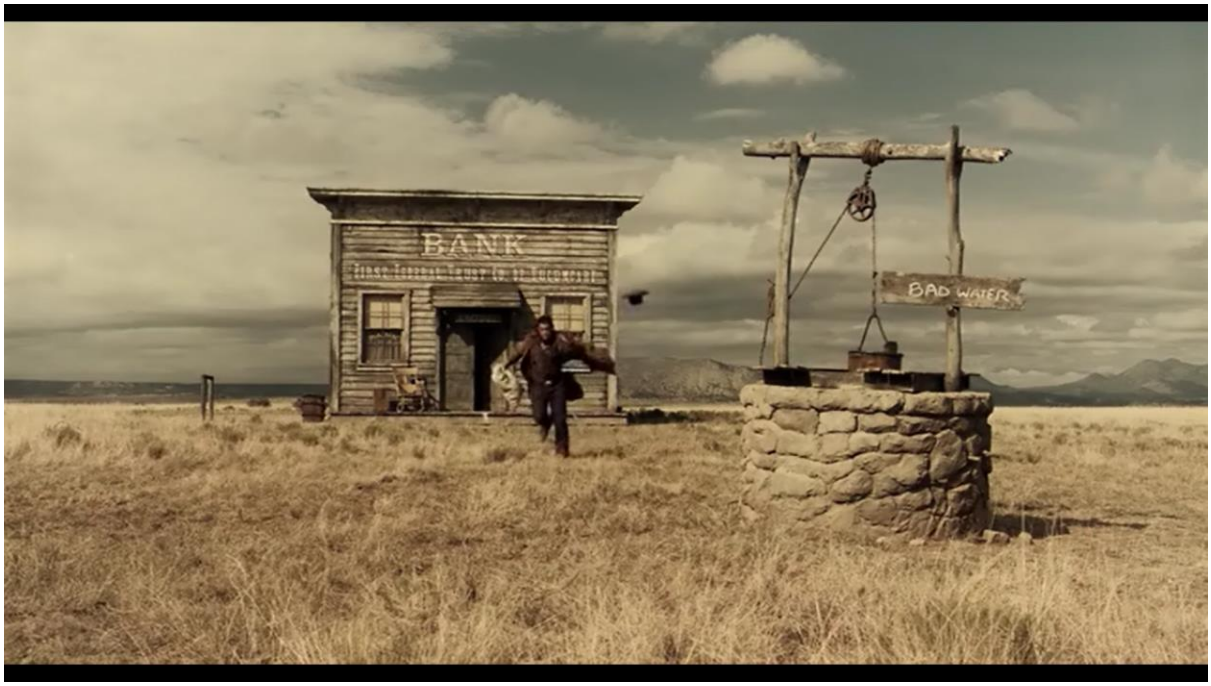

Figure 132 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

The Coen brothers have always maintained that the hat 'doesn't "represent" anything, it's just a hat'. However, taking account of these examples from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, it appears that they are playfully confirming that the blowing hat does indeed hold significance.[654] Whilst analysing *Miller's Crossing*, Allen notes that, in the most general sense, the gangster's 'hat protects him from the elements and from too much scrutiny. A man who has lost his hat has lost his head, maybe even his life'.[655] This equates the hat with a symbolic level of protection, both physically and in terms of identity. This is elaborated on by Richard Gaughran: 'Yes, sometimes a hat is just a hat, yet the hats of *Miller's Crossing* do have significance […] function[ing] as props in the process of self-creation. And, like the biblical Samson's hair, they correspond to personal power.'[656] In his

[653] Ibid.
[654] Coursodon, p. 44.
[655] Allen, p. xiv.
[656] Richard Gaughran, '"What Kind of Man Are You?" The Coen Brothers and Existentialist Role Playing, in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 227-242 (p. 232).

analysis, Gaughran states that when he loses his hat, Tom 'has lost a part of himself', and it becomes clear that the hat becomes a symbol of protection. Whenever a character is hatless, they are vulnerable, as in the scene where Leo beats Tom out of the club: 'rather than fighting back, [Tom] desperately attends to his hat, sometimes losing hold of it and then snatching it again.'[657] This also seems applicable to the instances where characters go hatless in their latest film. By introspectively remediating this imagery from *Miller's Crossing* in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, the Coen brothers are simultaneously informing their new film, admitting that their hat is significant, and also acknowledging that the imagery of their films has become a part of the cultural conversation, like the earlier filmmakers they remediate themselves; quite a hat trick indeed.

'Near Algodones' is also an important part of the anthology because it contains the film's clearest remediations of the Western master directors. After his robbery goes awry, Cowboy awakes to find himself in a noose. He is reprieved though when a group of Indians attack, killing everyone else, but leaving him on horseback with the rope still around his neck. The Indian ambush itself recalls a certain classical theme of the Western, creating a series of further hypermediative through-lines to myriad other films. Before, after some time, Cowboy spots a figure on the horizon.[658]

[657] Ibid., p. 232.
[658] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.

Figure 133 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

This shot is itself an introspective remediation of an earlier moment from its own film. During 'The Ballad of Buster Scruggs', the Kid is introduced in a similarly hazy, extremely long shot.[659]

Figure 134 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

[659] Ibid.

Both of these shots instantly recall the style which Leone used to frame his characters in his Spaghetti Westerns. This type of shot is evident at least a dozen times in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966), including when it is used for the introduction of Angel Eyes (Lee Van Cleef):[660]

Figure 135 - Screenshot from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966)

Interestingly, although not utilised to the same extent in his first films, the same type of shot is also present in *A Fistful of Dollars*, in evidence in the example below as The Man With No Name rides out of town after dark:[661]

[660] *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, dir. by Sergio Leone (Constantin Film, 1966).
[661] *A Fistful of Dollars*.

Figure 136 - Screenshot from *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)

In a way, this remediation acts to bring the Coen brothers full circle, as *A Fistful of Dollars* was also remediated in both *Blood Simple* and *Miller's Crossing*. By continually echoing their own work, especially their early films, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* potentially represents the end of a stage in their career. The Coen brothers have not announced their retirement, but these constant recollections of their past works certainly construe an air of finality. I will shortly address this feeling of closure in regards to the final part of the anthology, but it is notable that this film feels like an ending; indicative of an impending break, or yet another remediative evolution.

After he is freed from the noose in 'Near Algodones', Cowboy soon finds himself in another bad situation as he is arrested and taken to a nearby town. There, the Judge (Michael Cullen) sentences him to hang for stock rustling, a crime he did not commit and therefore indirectly remediating *The Man Who Wasn't There*. When he is first seen, the Judge is perched in a way which instantly brings one filmmaker to mind.[662]

[662] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.

Figure 137 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

This is a direct remediation of Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, where Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) is routinely seen sitting similarly perched in his chair:[663]

[663] *My Darling Clementine*, dir. By John Ford (Twentieth Century Fox, 1946).

Figure 138 - Screenshot from *My Darling Clementine* (1946)

Admittedly, the Coen brothers may have seen this image in numerous Westerns, Ford does not own this shot despite also using it on other occasions, as in *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) and *Two Rode Together* (1961), but by remediating *My Darling Clementine* here they are imbuing their Judge with the same levels of nobility and righteousness as Earp, such a prominent figure in the classical American representation of heroism and masculinity. However, throughout *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, there are several moments which seem to owe a debt to the classical Western style of Ford. This is most notable in story five, where the whole of 'The Gal who Got Rattled' feels familiarly Fordian, but this moment offers the clearest direct remediation of one of the great American filmmakers.

There is, however, a final instance where the remediation in 'Near Algodones' is introspective. Recalling their own version of *True Grit*, the Coen brothers end the second part of *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* in a piece of gallows humour, unavoidably conjuring memories of their earlier film. Once again finding

himself in a noose in ‘Near Algodones’, Cowboy seems to reassure one of his fellow condemned men, asking him ‘First time?’ Perplexed, the man stops crying to look at him, resuming his blubbering as a hood is placed over his head. The vignette then ends in darkness as Cowboy too is hooded and dropped to his death, the noise of the trap door releasing and the neck breaking confirming his fate.[664] A similarly macabre scene is also present in *True Grit*, as Mattie witnesses a hanging on her arrival in Fort Smith. Three men are on the gallows and are being afforded the opportunity for their final words. The first two, both white men, say their piece before the hood is slipped on their heads, the first man loudly sobbing like the man in ‘Near Algodones’. The third, however, a Native American, begins his speech, but is interrupted before he can say anything of import, creating a darkly humorous scene which is clearly thematically recalled in the later film.

True Grit is clearly introspectively remediated on at least two more occasions in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*. The third short, ‘Meal Ticket’, narrates the story of a travelling show. As ‘Meal Ticket’ progresses, the weather becomes increasingly wintry, with the snow and the cold setting in. Coupled with the presentation of Impresario (Liam Neeson) as a drunk, also recalling the characterisation of Cogburn, it is clear that ‘Meal Ticket’ harks back to their earlier Western. Meanwhile, ‘The Gal Who Got Rattled’, opens in the boarding house where Alice Longabaugh (Zoe Kazan) and her brother Gilbert (Jefferson Mays) are staying before their journey to Oregon. It is supper time, and during conversation at the table, the Landlady (Prudence Wright Holmes) remarks to one of the guests about Grandma Turner, who is also at the table but not eating or responsive. This fleeting incident, despite apparently being insignificant, is certainly notable in relation to *True Grit*, as in that film, Mattie must share a room at the boarding house in Fort Smith with a Grandma Turner. The fact that a Grandma Turner resides in both these establishments strongly suggests that ‘The Gal Who Got Rattled’ is set in the same world (the Coenverse) as *True Grit*, confirming that *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* is an amalgamation of the Coen brothers’ whole canon; an amalgamation of varied introspective remediations which sees the siblings

[664] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.

embracing their standing amongst Hollywood's elite filmmakers, whose works are influential to many.

'I apologise for disturbing anyone else if I did.'

This is even more plausible when considered in light of the final part of the anthology. 'The Mortal Remains' not only unites *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, but perhaps the entire Coen universe. Aside from its closing moments, the entire short unfolds in the confines of a single stagecoach, carrying five passengers to Fort Morgan. As the conversation between the occupants goes on, it begins to exude a mythological air, and it becomes clear that the coach is ferrying three of the passengers to the afterlife. Intriguingly, these three, a Frenchman (Saul Rubinek), a Lady (Tyne Daly) and a Trapper (Chelcie Ross), all appear to represent characters who have previously appeared in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.[665]

Figure 139 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

The Frenchman mentions a time he was playing poker, suggesting that this may be the same man, also credited as Frenchman (David Krumholtz), seen at the table with Buster during 'The Ballad of Buster Scruggs'.[666]

[665] *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*.
[666] Ibid.

Figure 140 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

The Trapper meanwhile discourses on his mostly solitary travails, and together with a striking facial similarity, he appears to be another version of the Prospector (Tom Waits), the subject of 'All Gold Canyon'.[667]

Figure 141 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

[667] Ibid.

Finally, the Lady laments over the three years she has been separated from her husband and staying with her daughter. Most likely, she is a representation of the woman sitting next to Grandma Turner at the boarding house in 'The Gal Who Got Rattled'.[668]

Figure 142 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

These connections establish that 'The Mortal Remains' is the key piece of the anthology. It is here the audience realise that every individual story ties together and has been leading to this final part. After all, in every tale some major character has died, and here we are travelling to the afterlife. This itself seems to comment on the nature of remediation and indeed on cinema itself. Can any character, or any film, ever really die when they have been committed to celluloid, and can then be remediated at any time into another work? More than this though, like their entire oeuvre, this short is an amalgamation; this time of the five preceding parts. This establishes and exemplifies how the Coen brothers are continuing to use the practice of remediation to construct their films. As with *Hail, Caesar!* before it though, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* utilises introspective remediation to simultaneously reflect their entire canon.

[668] Ibid.

Outlined above were examples of this from throughout the film, however, it is also just as apparent in ‘The Mortal Remains’. The other two passengers in the coach are ‘Reapers’, whose job it is to transport people to the afterlife. The one in charge, credited as Englishman (Jonjo O’Neill), talks philosophically, recalling some of the Coen brothers’ dialogue through the course of their career. This, alongside his appearance and demeanour instantly calls to mind the Professor from *The Ladykillers*.[669]

Figure 143 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

The other Reaper, credited as Irishman (Brendan Gleeson), is referred to as Clarence. In his appearance he also, like the other passengers, seems to recall an earlier character from the anthology, this time Impresario from ‘Meal Ticket’.[670]

[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid.

Figure 144 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

Figure 145 - Screenshot from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018)

However, as his fellow Reaper harks back to the Coen brothers' past, it is notable that in build and demeanour, Clarence can also be seen as a remediation of several Coen creations played by Goodman. Meanwhile, whilst his otherworldly employment and name appear simply to be a remediation of Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), it is actually an introspective remediation of this original

remediation. *The Hudsucker Proxy* features a guardian angel named Moses (Bill Cobbs) who, given the film's Screwball roots, is clearly shaped by the original Clarence. Therefore, the Clarence in 'The Mortal Remains' is an introspective reflection of Moses from their other film, himself a remediation of Capra. All of this means that 'The Mortal Remains' not only introspectively remediates its own film, making it an anthology in the truest sense, but that it is also an introspective remediation of the Coen brothers' wider body of work. Additionally, the wider theme of mortality and sense of finality apparent in this vignette couple together with these examples of introspection to suggest the ending of something. By including clear remediations to most of the Coenverse throughout the film, 'The Mortal Remains' points to these characters arriving in the afterlife of this universe, where The Professor from *The Ladykillers*, Ray from *Blood Simple*, Ed from *The Man Who Wasn't There*, and every other character who has died in their films, are joined by those who have passed on in *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*. The inclusion of this idea at the end of this film in turn indicates that the Coen brothers are drawing a line under their first eighteen films, whatever follows next will not be related. Interestingly, in April 2020 it was confirmed that Joel's next project will see his true solo directorial debut (not counting those Coen brothers' films where Ethan was uncredited). *The Tragedy of Macbeth* will see Joel reunite with his wife McDormand, features a score by Burwell and will be produced by Scott Rudin (who previously produced *No Country for Old Men*, *True Grit* and *Inside Llewyn Davies*), ensuring a familiar Coenesque vibe.[671] Filming is underway, but was suspended due to the global lockdown of 2020, so it remains to be seen if Ethan will have any hand in the finished film, most likely in editing, however, it seems to be a Joel film and not a Coen brothers one.[672] It would seem then that *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* does represent a culmination of the Coen brothers' canon, or at least a new beginning. Most intriguingly of all though, Joel has asserted that with *Macbeth*: 'Shakespeare sort of pre-figured certain tropes in American thriller and crime literature that were common in the early part of the 20th century.'[673] This hints that

[671] Zack Sharf, 'Joel Coen Teases His McDormand-Washington "Macbeth" Film a "Ticking-Clock" Thriller', *Indiewire*, April 13th 2020, https://www.indiewire.com/2020/04/joel-coen-frances-mcdormand-macbeth-thriller-1202224630/ [date accessed: 3rd July 2020].
[672] Jack Shepard, '"It's a very unique take on Macbeth" – Harry Melling teases Joel Coen's The Tragedy of Macbeth', *GamesRadar*, Thursday 2nd July 2020, https://www.gamesradar.com/joel-coen-tragedy-of-macbeth-harry-melling-unique-tease/ [date accessed: 3rd July 2020].
[673] Sharf.

his first solo film will return to the hard-boiled roots that were fundamental to the growth of the Coen brothers.

There have always been traces of self-remediation in the films of the Coen brothers, the way *Miller's Crossing* recalls *Blood Simple* through vomiting for example. However, with both of their latest films, this trait has evolved into something more. *Hail, Caesar!* remediates *Barton Fink* by focusing on the fictional film studio first featured in their fourth film, whilst it also recalls *The Big Lebowski* with its shared employment of one of Berkeley's trademark shots. Similarly, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* collects together remediations of *Miller's Crossing* and its disembodied hat, the setting and characterisation of *True Grit*, and even a fragment of *The Ladykillers*. Both still clearly recall the Coen brothers' idols and relevant influences, but, more so than ever before, these films also showcase an inward style of remediation. With *Hail, Caesar!* and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, the Coen brothers have entered a new phase of their filmmaking. No longer just amalgamating influences into their own films or using more straightforward methods of adaptation in their remediations, they now appear to be moving towards a form of introspective remediation, reflecting their standing in cinema: creative filmmakers whose use of remediative technique identifies them as important and influential artists worthy of remediation themselves.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this thesis, the Coen brothers should not be viewed as mere imitators or straightforward adaptors, unoriginal filmmakers with no creative value. They are in fact remediative amalgamators, who, through the employment of remediative filmmaking practices, are the embodiment of creative authors in a postmodern context. It is widely held that in contemporary art forms there is no longer any such thing as absolute originality, everything in any medium is, knowingly or unknowingly, a quotation or recollection of an existing work. More importantly, individual mediums are no longer able to exist in solitude, and these references can recall works from across different media (like literature, film, and music). In the twenty-first century, we live in an increasingly digital world where swathes of varied films (genres, styles, directors), literature (both fiction and non-fiction), music, even painting and other forms of art, are available to download and access from anywhere at the touch of a button. The Coen brothers seemed ready to predict this development, as all of their eighteen films thus far contain references and allusions to all different types of media influences. This is wrongly identified by many as a form of mere imitation, and even viewing it as an intertextual process is misleading, as the literary roots of this term are outdated in a world of varied inspirations. This then leads us to link the Coen brothers' filmmaking to the theory of remediation, originally formulated by Bolter and Grusin. Remediation describes how, in the postmodern digital landscape, every work interacts with existing pieces from across the media spectrum in a way which is both deliberate and unavoidable, but also not necessarily equivalent with mere imitation.

I have taken this basic theoretical framework, which was primarily focused on digital and computing landscapes, expanded on it, and elaborated, so that it now covers a style of filmmaking which encompasses these qualities; a creative remediative process. The Coen brothers exemplify this, they are remediative filmmakers who actively engage with, and are influenced by, older works from various fields in a way which honours and acknowledges the original sources (they never deny their influences). At the same time though, these remediations of their influences also creatively informs their own films, which therefore sees their works represent relatively original entities in a postmodern landscape. Rather than being

a practice of mere imitation or cannibalisation of existing works, this process of remediation is one of purposeful references and assembly. Interestingly, whilst this thesis has been chiefly concerned with identifying and cataloguing the major examples of these remediations in their works, and by no means have I been able to include even all I uncovered, touched on in several analyses of these moments throughout their canon have been recollections of different media and meanings which point to a deeper and motivated reasoning for this process of cinematic remediation. In readings such as the remediation of Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* in the Coen brothers' debut *Blood Simple*, which suggested a nuanced political message on the state of the Cold War in the 1980s, and the recollection of the Communist paranoia of Classic Hollywood in *Hail, Caesar!*, the siblings are using remediative processes to infuse their work with additional commentary. This, alongside the use of period settings for their stories and specific genre and stylistic choices, allows the Coen brothers to infuse their films with forms and layers of expositional commentary on American social, cultural and political history, in ways which allow them to challenge, explore and elaborate on these issues. The remediative quality of their films, the very quality which defines them, also allows for commentary to be passed on current affairs in a way which does not see them viewed as politically incendiary filmmakers. Whilst this thesis has not concentrated on this aspect of their remediative filmmaking, there is certainly enough evidence to form the basis of a more in-depth study of this practice in the films of the Coen brothers and their contemporaries.

The first part of this thesis focused on the Coen brothers' remediation of American Detective fiction. Four of their first nine films were shaped by the so-called hard-boiled writing of the three big names of this style, Hammett, Chandler, and Cain. As such, these films (*Blood Simple*, *Miller's Crossing*, *The Big Lebowski* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*) all contain plots, themes and imagery directly remediated from many of these authors' works. However, there are also moments which, although obviously inspired by and comparable to elements from said works, have been altered, inverted, or dynamically reversed, so that they are better suited to, and more in keeping with, the purposes of the stories being told by the Coen brothers. These are most suitably thought of as indirect remediations, and there are as many examples of these in the films as there are of direct

remediations. This, however, does not mean that these films are solely composed of direct and indirect remediations of hard-boiled fiction. Each also features numerous other remediations, both direct and indirect, of various sources from different media (including, but not limited to, film, literature, and music), alongside original ideas, moments, and touches. In fact, all of these remediations are creatively integrated with the Coen brothers' own stories to form remediative amalgamations.

The first chapter examined their debut film *Blood Simple*. Even in the initial analysis of the hard-boiled inspirations of the film, it was clear that this process of amalgamation was key, as it blends motifs and details from the work of both Hammett and Cain. Moreover though, the film also memorably remediates Hitchcock's *Psycho* and his *Torn Curtain*, as well as Leone's Spaghetti Western interpretation of Hammett's *Red Harvest*. All of these works are selectively remediated and then mixed in with a Coen brothers' story and images to create something new: a remediative amalgamation.

This was followed by an in-depth study of *Miller's Crossing*. Seemingly carrying on from *Blood Simple*, their third film is their most overt tribute to Hammett, with most of his work, including other cinematic versions of it, remediated into the film throughout. Contained within their Hammett story about a gang war set in Depression-era America are also moments which (re)capture other notable works, including films like *The Third Man* and *Sullivan's Travels*, as well as 'emotive' songs like 'Danny Boy'. As with their debut film, all of these separate remediations are blended in with an original story to create an amalgamative whole.

This process is again the central focus of the third chapter as I switched my attention to the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski*. In my view their crowning achievement, it sees them train their remediative gaze upon Chandler's literature. However, like with *Miller's Crossing* beforehand, this also involves cinematic adaptations of his novels, and not just the majority of his own works. It is their ode to Chandler, but because it also remediates two further Hitchcock films, the work of Dali, Wagnerian opera, Bugs Bunny, and the films of Berkeley, amongst other sources, it is also their most amalgamative feature.

The fourth chapter witnessed how they finished this trend by utilising the work of Cain in *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Taking cues from much of the writer's canon, the film became the Coen brothers' tribute to Cain, just as *Miller's Crossing* and *The Big Lebowski* were there ultimate versions of stories by the other members of the American Detective trinity. Just as with those films though, *The Man Who Wasn't There* does more than acknowledge and honour the work of one man. It also remediates another Hitchcock film, as well as *The Night of the Hunter*, whilst it manages to incorporate and pay tribute to the themes and imagery of both film noir and film gris alongside 1950s science fiction. Once again, by collecting all of these influences in their own story, the Coen brothers present an amalgamative remediation.

Indeed, this amalgamative practice of filmmaking can be seen in all of their films, and although still evident in later chapters, the second part of this thesis switched its focus, mirroring the Coen brothers' own career, to a different approach. The fifth chapter addressed how their remediative filmmaking extends into specific modes of adaptation through an analysis of *No Country for Old Men*, and the film's connections with their unfilmed screenplay of *To the White Sea*. Arguably, it was that abandoned project which saw their career evolve past the amalgamous style of their first nine films, as they were deep in pre-production on it following *The Man Who Wasn't There*. When it was shelved in 2001, the Coen brothers seemed to falter, with two films regarded by many as the low point of their career. Tellingly though, in 2007 they bounced back with *No Country for Old Men*, an adaptation which both directly and indirectly remediates the original literary source, whilst also recalling other intermedial sources. The film, as I have demonstrated, was also influenced and shaped by their previously abandoned adaptation of *To the White Sea*; a remediative product of their unfilmed project.

This remediative approach to adaptation is also a feature in chapter six, looking at their *True Grit* and *The Ladykillers*. Both these films retell stories already immortalised on screen, but the Coen brothers' use of creative remediation places these films in a category beyond the mere remake. *True Grit* returns to the plot and narrative of the original novel, not the earlier film. However, it also filters the story through the influence of many other intermedial sources, a creative practice also

seen in *The Ladykillers*, which effectively transforms both in a way that sees them become new entities, which I have coined remediative reimaginings.

Their two latest films, *Hail, Caesar!* and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, take their employment of remediation in yet another direction. Chapter seven identifies a new evolution in remediative filmmaking, introspection. Whilst every film in their canon has always contained some sort of link back to their own oeuvre (be it thematic, stylistic, image or character based), this trait seems to be the cohesive glue which ties both of these anthology films together. Both include references to their previous films, remediations of key plot and themes from their canon, and even apparent confirmation of theories and elements from their past works, such as the mysterious hat from *Miller's Crossing*. It perhaps also shows that the Coen brothers are accepting a new standing as influential and established Hollywood filmmakers themselves, and by remediating their own work, are acknowledging that the generation of filmmakers who have been raised on their work will have been influenced by them, just as they were influenced by past masters. This introspective remediation creates films which are self-contained, but also part of a wider universe for those willing to follow the Coen brothers down this particular rabbit hole, and it also conjures a sense of finality; a 'closure' of this phase of their work which may explain why Joel is now going solo.

The interpretations contained in this thesis may have to be re-evaluated or reformed in the future as more films are produced and released. However, it is my view that every statement and judgement made in this work is accurate, and importantly it is also clear that remediative filmmaking offers a valuable new approach to film studies. Whilst this thesis chose to focus on half of the Coen brothers' features, an in-depth analysis of the other nine films looking at their remediative nature would also be worthwhile, perhaps concurring with the results of this thesis, or even possibly adding to it by identifying other modes of remediation in filmmaking. Likewise, further studies of remediative theory in relation to film, or in the specific context of other filmmakers could also be valuable, with the work of Soderbergh instantly springing to mind. Meanwhile, a more in-depth study focusing on the remediation of music in film may also be valuable, perhaps beginning with an analysis of Edgar Wright's work. Otherwise, carrying on from the structure of this thesis, and the ways in which the Coen brothers remediate various media and

culture, it would make sense to extend this study into a consideration of the films of Quentin Tarantino. His constant references to other films, use of music and reflections of popular culture, are traits which many use to hold his films up as unlike anything else. However, as I have demonstrated, this is the marker of remediative filmmaking in general, and whilst Tarantino's first film, *Reservoir Dogs*, utilised remediative techniques in 1992, the Coen brothers were employing the same methods nearly a decade earlier. Admittedly though, Tarantino has a more global frame of reference (European and Eastern as well as American) compared to the Coen brothers (predominantly American or British), suggesting yet more modes of remediative filmmaking theory. The potential opportunities and future implications of the remediative approaches to filmmaking which I have put forward in this thesis are exciting and numerous, but in terms of the Coen brothers, one thing seems certain; they abide.

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